

An Article of Interest Dealing with Career Issues

Getting Away With Murder

Murderers getting clean-up tips from television shows

By Cynthia Brown ~ Reprinted courtesy of American Police Beat, March, 2006

Killers seem to be getting a leg up on crime scene investigators by watching television. Forensic investigators say that shows like CSI have given murderers a crash course in the intricacies of crime scene clean-up.

When **Tammy Klein**, a senior criminalist from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, began investigating crime scenes eight years ago, there was much more in the way of physical evidence at the scene of a homicide. It was virtually unheard of for a killer to use bleach to clean up blood evidence, according to a recent AP article written by **Joe Milicia**.

But that's all changed and some believe the popularity of shows like "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation" is playing a role. These days, investigators aren't at all surprised to find evidence of bleach at the scene of a planned homicide.

Klien and other experts believe there's a connection between the new level of forensic sophistication of murderers and the popularity of television crime dramas.

In a related phenomenon, prosecutors have complained for years about "the CSI effect" on juries.

Jurors are dumbfounded by how much longer it takes to resolve an actual killing as opposed to the neat and tidy resolution offered on a one-hour network television show.

But the pressing issue is the homicide clean-up tips that criminals are gleaned from the screen.

"They're actually educating these potential killers even more," **Capt. Ray Peavy**, also of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and head of the LASD Homicide Division told the AP's Joe Milicia. "Sometimes I believe it may even encourage them when they see how simple it is to get away with on television."

And he may have a point. A man charged in a recent double-homicide in Ohio was a "CSI" fan and went to great lengths to cover his tracks, according to an affidavit filed by Trumbull County prosecutors.

Jermaine "Maniac" McKinney, 25, allegedly broke into a house, killed a mother and

daughter and used bleach to remove their blood from his hands, prosecutors said. He also allegedly covered the interior of a getaway car to avoid transferring blood. I guess we can blame "Pulp Fiction" for that one.

Cases where suspects burn and tamper with evidence seem to be increasing as well, said **Chuck Morrow**, chief of the criminal division in the Trumbull County Prosecutor's office.

"People are getting more sophisticated with making sure they're not leaving trace evidence at crime scenes," Morrow told Milicia.

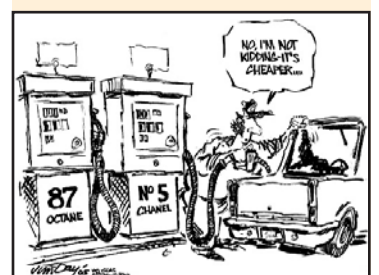
Klein said most crimes aren't well planned and that a lack of trace evidence typically occurs in cases where someone has killed a family member or business partner.

"For the most part, our killings involve gang bangers who for the most part are pretty stupid," Klein said.

Sophisticated planning and concealment of evidence are aberrations, not the norm, said **Larry Pozner**, the former president of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

"Most people who commit crimes are not very bright and don't take many precautions," Pozner said. "CSI and all the other crime shows will make no difference." ■

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