

DV & Asking the Right Questions

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) hosted its Fresno Out of the Darkness Walk at Woodward Park in September, and it was a major success. All teams combined raised over \$26,000 towards suicide prevention and there were more attendees this year than ever before. Large stacks of pamphlets on identifying warning signs and conversation starters at the AFSP resource table quickly dwindled down to empty boxes before the end of the event. Organizations representing local mental health services, addiction recovery, and gun-lock safety shared important information for attendees and contributed towards the cause. But as September Suicide Prevention segways into Domestic Violence Awareness this October, Crime Scene Cleaners continue to be involved.

Fresno County currently has the highest per capita calls to law enforcement for domestic violence in California. The Marjaree Mason Center, Fresno's local and long standing domestic violence shelter not only provides refuge from those fleeing from domestic violence, but they also offer education, training, and various types of survivor support along with a 24/7 crisis line. Reaper Clean, Fresno's local biohazard remediation company, actually has a background in crisis work. Their social service backbone in crime scene cleaning came from experience working in domestic violence shelters outside of the biohazard field.

For those unfamiliar with the cycle of violence—there are only three ways this type of relationship can come to an end. A partner successfully leaves, a partner goes to jail, or a partner dies. Not only can the cycle of violence sometimes end with a death, but there can often times be multiple deaths from either a homicide or suicide. Marjaree Mason herself, the namesake of our Fresno shelter, was murdered in 1978 by her ex-boyfriend who immediately took his own life after taking Marjaree's. It should also be noted that when the victim tries to leave is when their life and the situation at hand is most volatile.

When a Crime Scene Cleaner responds to a call where domestic violence or any crime has taken place, one of the most important questions to ask before heading to the scene is whether or not that scene has been released. This can be followed up with a phone call to the coroner or a police report number. If the incident is still under investigation, cleaners cannot access the area. If first responders weren't involved or there is no record of them being involved, this is a red flag.

The next question to ask is whether or not the perpetrator has been apprehended. Technicians spend a significant amount of time inside of private homes or residences performing a thorough service to remediate potentially infectious and biological material. It is of the utmost importance to know whether there is a possibility that a dangerous person could return to the home while team members are on site. In this instance, the service may have to wait, or law enforcement may need to be present during the work.

Other important questions to ask have to do with property ownership and consent for service. It may be that the owner of the home is in jail, and a family member or partner who lives there is trying to get things cleaned up before they or their children return. Perhaps the owner is in the hospital, incapacitated, or deceased. Perhaps it is a rental and the owner doesn't know. Being able to understand the dynamic of people on site, the legal property owner, and the situation at hand can help technicians advocate for the appropriate next steps.

These are all factors that technicians have to consider in how to approach each scene ethically, legally, and safely for the purpose of remediation. By asking the right questions and taking notes about

potential hazards or complicating factors surrounding a job, the team can better prepare for each unique circumstance that they come across, including domestic violence situations.

For more information about Reaper Clean, go to www.reaperclean.com, email onthescene@reaperclean.com, or follow on Facebook, Instagram, or Tiktok @reaper_clean.