

## Ethics in cleaning

Crime scene cleaning may not seem like a career path that many would willingly venture into, let alone want to read about, but the taboo surrounding the death-care industry is starting to crack open. People are curious about the work done behind the scenes.

Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, death was something that mostly occurred in the home. Families were the ones responsible for handling their deceased loved ones. Back then, crime scene cleaners began as simple community members. For example, these cleaners were mothers in church groups and friends within the neighborhood who would come together after accidents. But at the turn of the 20th century, as institutions like hospitals and funeral homes took over the task of caring for the deceased, our connection to death care changed drastically, and now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, death care is changing once again.

There is no shortage of resumes from people wanting to perform this service, and it makes sense. With feelings of powerlessness in the wake of public loss or a personal connection to suicide, community members are once again looking for ways to help. Tragedy is in the spotlight like never before. As of May 2023, there have been over 200 mass shootings in the United States, which equates to at least one mass killing per week since the start of the new year. With social media as a driving force in exposure—Reaper Clean's phone line has received numerous calls from young people wanting to join the team.

With the heightened interest in this career comes the responsibility to educate without sensationalizing the work or violating the privacy of customers. There is a death-positive movement taking place in the United States right now. A growing number of people share the belief that talking about death openly is necessary. It's time to destigmatize facing our mortality, and crime scene cleaners are embracing this audience to create open and honest conversations about the work. Nevertheless, this is all still a fairly new exploration, and the narrative of ethics in which to do this is still being created.

Reaper Clean is very direct about its service capability as well as its advocacy in the field of crime scene cleaning. As a small biohazard remediation business in the central valley, the independent company prefers to do its marketing off-scene. The company wants to tell stories, share resources, and get involved in the issues that intersect with their work, such as suicide prevention and grief support. If it does come down to sharing content while on scene, the cleaners have guidelines to ensure that they aren't degrading the space.

Discussions either focus on the work itself or offer educational value to the public or other crime scene cleaners. Technicians should not be revealing secrets, exposing bizarre collections, or speaking ill of the dead in any way. Humor as a coping mechanism to get through the task at hand is perfectly okay. However, exploiting these moments on social media or publicly degrading any life that existed in the space being serviced is not okay. Images should display educational information or service capability. Trigger warnings should be attached before images are shown. With these things in mind, it becomes easier to discern the quality of care delivered by the service provider who is offering the content.

For those interested in crime scene cleaning as a career, restoring intimate spaces after a trauma has occurred is no easy task. Crime scene cleaners are arriving on-site at abnormal hours, preparing to spend a substantial amount of time in someone's home performing structural remediation work. The manual labor required to remediate hazardous situations can be exhausting and requires creativity per every unique circumstance. Crime scene cleaners also have the sole responsibility of going through the

privacy of a person's belongings and either restoring them or discarding them due to saturation or contact with potentially infectious material. While gloved hands are sifting through the life of a person who is no longer with us, a level of compassion and professionalism must remain in the room. It isn't about just having the stomach for something like this, it's about having a steady heart.

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