



RUSSELLVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT
POLICY MANUAL

Policy Number:
Section:
Original Date:
Revised Date:

PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to ensure a consistent and standardized methodology to determine the origin and cause of fires. Fire incidents should be investigated as accurately and efficiently as possible, in a systematic and defensible process. Proper follow-up is essential to ensure arson is quickly identified and potential consumer product defects reported.

POLICY

Fire Investigations shall follow guidance provided by the accepted standard: National Fire Protection Association 921: Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations.

When an investigator arrives at a fire scene, the Incident Commander and the investigator will confer to communicate information regarding the situation. It will be the investigator's responsibility to escalate the investigation as deemed necessary to include all necessary resources, including the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. Entry/overhaul of any structure/vehicle will be closely coordinated between Incident Command and the Fire Investigator.

When an investigator is not immediately available to respond to the scene, the Incident Commander is responsible to ensure the property is cordoned to prohibit any access.

Pre-Examination Interviews

The investigator should conduct brief interviews with the first arriving fire crew to obtain information relative to conditions encountered, forced entry mode, or any observations that will assist the investigator. The investigator should also conduct brief interviews of witnesses, bystanders, or other persons who may provide insight as to the cause of the incident. Information should be collected on RFD Form – Witness Statement for Investigation.

Safety

An investigation should be conducted during daylight with two or more persons present. However, situations will arise in which the fire scene will be investigated during night hours utilizing artificial lighting. This should include two or more investigators. This may include personnel from a fire company accompanying an investigator. If a fire company is no longer at the investigation site, one shall be provided to the fire investigation upon request to the Battalion Chief.

Investigator(s) shall wear safety equipment as the scene dictates e.g., hard hat, boots, dust mask, protective clothing, etc. Investigators shall not enter structures until atmospheric conditions are tenable.

Additional safety equipment may be obtained from a company operating at the scene. An officer of the apparatus equipment is pulled from should be notified.

Approved

Fire Chief

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Photographs

Photographs taken at incident scenes will become part of the investigative report. A photo log shall be provided for photographs taken in conjunction with investigations. Photo documentation of incidents should be thorough and complete. All areas of the incident including interior, exterior, evidence, and extent of damage, etc. shall be photographed.

When working in conjunction with the RPD, photographs may be delegated to the officer/detective assigned to the investigation.

Evidence Collection and Preservation

All physical evidence observed at an incident scene shall be properly collected, itemized, analyzed, and stored for criminal/civil court. Evidence should be submitted for review to the Arkansas Crime Laboratory (ACL). Any evidence being submitted to the ACL shall be done through the RPD. Proper chain of custody forms shall be provided for all evidence collected.

Evidence that has been analyzed and returned to the investigator should be transferred to the custody of the RPD for proper safeguarding until such time the evidence is no longer useful. When working in conjunction with the RPD, the officer/detective assigned to the investigation shall perform all evidence collection with any necessary assistance provided by RFD.

Scene Examination

When investigating fires/explosions the investigator shall use the scientific methodology to develop a hypothesis, test the hypothesis, and draw a conclusion.

1. Structure Fires

- a. Survey and photograph the exterior of the structure for evidence of external sources of ignition and physical evidence. Photograph/note the condition/position of doors, windows, and locking devices.
- b. Examine the utility services (gas, electric, telephone, cable for fire cause or service status). A technician from the utility company may be utilized for this examination.
- c. Enter the structure when atmospheric conditions permit to determine area of origin.
- d. Once the area has been determined, examine this area thoroughly for fire cause. The cause determination should be documented with photographs and sketches.
- e. Evidence of incendiary fires should be properly collected and submitted for analysis.
- f. After completing the scene examination the building should be turned over to a responsible party.

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2. Fatal fires

- a. Secure the scene immediately. Allow for only essential fire operations.
- b. Request a RPD detective.
- c. If the victim has been moved, i.e. resuscitation, immediately interview the firefighters who first discovered and/or moved the victim. Obtain the firefighter's written statement as soon as possible.
- d. The fire investigation shall be conducted simultaneously and in cooperation with RPD.
- e. The Fire, Building & Safety Division shall have authority over the fire investigation.
- f. If homicide or suicide is suspected, the RPD shall be lead on the death investigation.
- g. All fires resulting in fatal injury shall be reported to the Arkansas State Fire Marshal's office within three business days of the occurrence. This shall be done on department letterhead or via electronic mail.

3. Vehicle Fires

- a. Examine exterior of vehicle for exterior sources of ignition, body damage, tires, and physical evidence.
- b. Examine engine compartment for mechanical/electrical causes or engine condition.
- c. Examine passenger compartment for fire cause or physical evidence.
- d. Document license plate and VIN.
- e. Examine trunk compartment
- f. Photograph and sketch vehicle location showing relative location on property and extent of damage.
- g. Gather and process and physical evidence of incendiary fires.

4. Miscellaneous Fires

Examination of these scenes should follow guidelines similar to those for structure and vehicle fires.

5. Explosives Incidents

For the safety of all personnel the investigation of incidents involving explosive devices shall be conducted under the direction of the Conway Fire Department Bomb Squad.

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Additional Resources

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms shall be requested for any fire meeting the following criteria:

1. Involves interstate commerce
2. Related to a hate crime
3. Is incendiary and located on a church property
4. Dollar loss exceeds one million dollars in damage and is suspicious

Report/Case Preparation

The fire investigator will make all necessary entries in ESO regarding any incident that they investigate.

For every scene examination a report shall be prepared and saved in the Record Management System by the fire investigator who investigated the incident. The Report shall include scene sketches, photo log and evidence log, and a narrative including all facts of the case and an opinion/summary as to the origin and cause of the fire.

All photographs taken by fire investigators of the scene/incident will be filed with the final report.

Results of a fire investigation shall be reported as one of the following:

1. Accidental
2. Natural
3. Incendiary
4. Undetermined

Atmospheric Conditions

Fire scene atmospheres may contain ignitable gas, vapors, and liquids, in addition to unknown by-products of combustion. When investigating a fire, the atmosphere should be free of particulate matter. If extenuating circumstances make it necessary to conduct an investigation prior to expulsion of all particulate matter, SCBA shall be worn by all personnel active in the investigation.

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