



Rogers Fire Department Standard Operating Procedures

Policy Title:	Fire Investigation		
Policy Number:	106	Volume:	Administration
Approved By:	Tom Jenkins	Last Updated:	October 2013
CFAI Reference:	5D.2, 5D.6, 5D.7	CAAS Reference:	N/A
Revision Summary:	Created – June 2011 Formatted – May 2012 Revised – October 2013 (Risk Reduction Division)		

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the points of origin and cause for all fires are identified to the extent possible. Accurate information is necessary for budgeting, fire prevention, and other municipal uses. Proper follow-up will be instituted on all fires to ensure arson is quickly identified and potential consumer product defects reported.

POLICY

The incident commander is responsible for determining the point of origin and cause of a fire. Under certain circumstances the IC will need additional assistance. A fire investigator (trained member of the Risk Reduction Division) shall be called to the following incidents:

1. At the discretion of the Risk Reduction Division
2. Death or serious injury caused by fire (non-motor vehicle)
3. A fire that could exceed a \$100,000 loss
4. A fire that is believed to be incendiary in nature
5. A fire in which the cause is difficult to determine by company officers
6. A fire in which a suspected arsonist is identified by witnesses or victims
7. Any unique or complicated situation involving a suspicious, or consequential fire

When a fire investigator is called, the company officer should fill out the incident report in all areas except those relating to the cause of the fire, unless the investigator provides instructions on what to report. Where an investigation is continuing, write, "Under investigation by Rogers Risk Reduction Division".

The Risk Reduction Division shall develop an “on-call” schedule and keep the Communications Center notified as to the fire investigator to be “on-call” at any given time. All members of the Risk Reduction Division are issued cellular telephones for this notification.

Fire Investigation Procedures

Upon arrival at a fire scene, the investigator will immediately confer with the incident commander to receive information regarding the situation. Through information received it will be up to the investigator to escalate the investigation as deemed necessary to include all necessary resources, including the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. Prior to commencing scene examination, the investigator shall take the necessary precautions to prevent entry into the scene by unauthorized persons or non-essential fire department personnel. Entry/overhaul of any structure/vehicle will be closely coordinated between Command the Fire Investigator. The following may be utilized to secure a scene:

1. Fire line or hazardous area tape
2. Police Officers
3. Fire Department personnel
4. Other means as circumstances dictate

Pre-Examination Interviews

The investigator should conduct brief interviews with 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. Obtain the following information:

1. phone number (cell or emergency contact)
2. address
3. date of birth
4. social security number
5. employer (name, address, and phone number)

When working in conjunction with Rogers Police Department (RPD) Detectives. Interviewing of witnesses shall be done in with representatives from both agencies.

Safety Equipment

Prior to entering an emergency scene the investigator shall wear safety equipment as the scene dictates (i.e., 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. Prior to removing equipment from a fire apparatus advise the appropriate driver or company officer of your equipment needs.

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 discovered, and extent of damage, etc. shall be photographed.

When working in conjunction with the RPD, photographs shall 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.

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.

2. Fatal fires

- a. Secures 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 Risk Reduction 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 Northwest Arkansas Bomb Squad.

Additional Resources

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

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

Report/Case Preparation

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

For every scene examination a report shall be prepared and saved in the Record Management System by the inspector 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 the Fire Prevention Division of the scene/incident will be filled with the final report.

Atmospheric Conditions

Fire scene atmospheres may contain ignitable gas, vapors, and liquids, in addition to the by-products of combustion, the atmosphere shall be tested prior to conducting an investigation. The following conditions shall be within the limits listed below:

- Carbon Monoxide (CO): < 30 PPM
- Hydrogen Sulfide (H₂S): < 10 PPM
- Hydrogen Cyanide (HCN): < 10 PPM

Other Agencies

Following is a listing of other agencies that shall be contacted, based upon the circumstances of the incident, and other agencies that might be of assistance during an investigation.

Arkansas State Crime Laboratory (501) 227-5745
The ASCL shall be used to analysis evidence for traces of accelerants.

Arkansas State Fire Marshal (501) 618-8600
The ASFM shall be notified within three business days following a fire death.

Benton County Assessor's Office (479) 271-1037
Contact the BCAO to collect property information.

Benton County Fire Marshal (479) 616-4347
The BCFM shall be notified of all investigations located on county owned property.

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (501) 324-6457
The ATF shall be requested for any fire meeting the following criteria:

- *Involves interstate commerce*
- *Related to a hate crime*
- *Is incendiary and located on a church property*
- *Dollar loss exceeds one million dollars in damage and is suspicious*

Northwest Arkansas Bomb Squad (479) 271-3170
*The NABS shall be contacted in incidents involving explosive devices.
Investigations shall be conducted under the sole direction of the NABS.*