

Fire Investigations

402.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all fires and explosions responded to by the Fresno County Fire Protection District and occurring within this jurisdiction are investigated and properly documented in accordance with state and federal laws as well as national standards.

402.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Fresno County Fire Protection District to promptly investigate the cause, origin, and circumstances of fires and explosions occurring in this jurisdiction that involve the loss of life or injury to a person, or the destruction of or damage to property.

402.3 RESPONSIBILITIES

The Fire Chief has overall responsibility for fire investigations. The Fire Prevention Bureau is responsible for management of the fire investigations program. The Incident Commander (IC) of each incident is responsible for ensuring that each fire is investigated for origin and cause.

402.4 INCIDENT REPORTS

All initial fire investigations shall be documented using the current version of CALFIRS reporting document. All portions of the CALFIRS report shall be completely and accurately completed as applicable. All information from field notes shall be accurately and completely transferred into CALFIRS. All field notes shall be destroyed upon complete and accurate transfer of information into CALFIRS. All CALFIRS reports shall be completed no later than seven calendar days from the day of the incident. For additional information, see the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) Policy.

The Fire Prevention Bureau is responsible for reviewing and approving the investigative reports.

402.5 PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

The first-in company officer should conduct a preliminary investigation of each fire or explosion to identify the origin, cause, and circumstances. The company officer will notify the IC of the results of the preliminary investigation.

If the origin of a fire or explosion appears to be suspicious, the IC should take immediate charge of all physical evidence relating to the fire or explosion and coordinate with fire investigators.

The IC is responsible for determining when fire investigators or fire investigators with arrest authority are appropriate to investigate an incident. The assistance of a fire investigator at an incident does not relieve the company officer of the responsibility to investigate the origin, cause and circumstances of the incident.

The immediate response of an appropriate investigator should be requested when any of the following circumstances exist:

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- (a) Major or unusual fires that exceed the investigative abilities of a company officer
- (b) Any fire resulting in a major injury or death
- (c) Incidents involving special circumstances, such as an especially high dollar loss, extensive damage, political sensitivity, or any other circumstance deemed appropriate by the Duty Officer
- (d) There is evidence that incendiary devices are involved, or the origin of the fire is otherwise suspicious
- (e) There has been an explosion
- (f) There is evidence or suspicion that a crime has occurred in connection with a fire or explosion
- (g) A fire has been started by a juvenile
- (h) Any illegal activity that potentially could cause a fire and/or explosion has occurred

402.6 EQUIPMENT

The fire investigator's vehicle should be stocked with the following equipment to help investigate fire cause, origin, and circumstance:

- Digital camera
- Spare batteries
- Voice recording device and spare media
- Fire investigator toolbox
- Shovels, rake, broom, and sifter
- Disposable latex evidence collection gloves
- Evidence collection markers and labels for canisters

402.6.1 USE OF PROTECTIVE GEAR

Fire investigators are responsible for using personal protective equipment (PPE) and respiratory protection appropriate for the conditions present at an investigation scene.

When entering any fire scene during the fire, before or during overhaul, or when there is a chance of reignition, fire investigators shall wear full structural PPE and self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA).

See the Respiratory Protection Program Policy and the Personal Protective Equipment Policy for additional guidance.

402.6.2 LOGBOOK

Each investigator should maintain a logbook of field training, continued professional training hours, and investigative experience. The purpose of this log is to assist in establishing the member as an expert witness in court appearances.

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402.7 DUTY FIREARMS

Fire investigators with arrest authority who are authorized to carry firearms shall also comply with the Duty Firearms and Use of Force Policy.

402.8 FIRE INVESTIGATORS

Fire investigators assigned to an incident are responsible for pursuing the investigation through its completion and providing complete written documentation.

402.8.1 FIRE INVESTIGATOR QUALIFICATIONS

Fire investigators should:

- (a) Meet the job performance requirements of the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) standards for fire investigators.
- (b) Complete the certification requirements of the California Office of the State Fire Marshal certification program for fire investigators.
- (c) Complete the certification requirements of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) courses FI-210 and FI-3120.
- (d) Comply with all federal and state statutory and constitutional investigatory requirements, including limitations on searches and seizures.

402.9 FIRE INVESTIGATORS WITH ARREST AUTHORITY

Fire investigators with arrest authority assigned to an incident are responsible for conducting a thorough investigation and providing complete written documentation.

402.9.1 FIRE INVESTIGATORS WITH ARREST AUTHORITY QUALIFICATIONS

In addition to the general qualifications for fire investigators required by this policy, fire investigators with arrest authority shall complete the training required for peace officers as provided in Penal Code § 832.