

	FIRE INVESTIGATION GUIDELINES	2014revA
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Procedure:

The first arriving fire officer or acting company officer (officer) shall be responsible for the initiation of a fire investigation and assisting with completion of appropriate reports, as dictated by the complexity of the event. For incidents where a more complex fire investigation is indicated, the first arriving fire inspection technician (FIT) shall be responsible for initiating and coordinating the investigation response, including assisting with completion of appropriate reports.

Working Within the Incident Command System

The FIT and all members of the fire investigation team will work within the established incident command system. Depending on the unique circumstances of the incident, the FIT and/or fire investigator may function as a single resource or may work for an Investigation Group Supervisor if that position is created by Incident Command (IC). In all cases, the individual performing the fire investigation must keep the IC informed about the status and progress of the investigation and any associated needs.

Size-Up Considerations

As with combat firefighting, the size-up is one of the most critical components for the development of an effective fire investigation plan. The size-up provides an initial evaluation of the incident scene and potential hazards that could be faced by the investigator(s). The first arriving investigator shall consider the following questions when preparing a fire investigation plan:

- What has happened?

- What is happening now?
- What is likely to happen?

Resource Needs

The first arriving company officer or acting company officer sets the stage for the success of all subsequent fire investigation activities. The first arriving company officer shall notify the IC as soon as possible if s/he needs assistance from the on-duty FIT or other agencies to complete a fire investigation. Similarly, the on-duty FIT shall notify the IC as soon as possible if s/he needs assistance from additional fire investigators or experts from other agencies to complete a fire investigation. Examples of other agencies that should be considered for inclusion in fire investigations are addressed in the Assembling an Investigation Team section of this guideline.

Levels of Fire Investigation:

Fire investigations may be viewed in context of their anticipated complexity. When considering whether assistance is needed from a FIT or fire investigator, consider the following:

- Is local law enforcement available to assist with investigation needs?
- Is there physical evidence at the fire scene that Operations personnel cannot preserve?
- Are there witnesses and/or suspects at the scene who require immediate interviews that can only be conducted by a FIT or fire investigator?
- Are there reasons to believe that a FIT or fire investigator will be able to perform any tasks that could not reasonably be performed by Operations personnel?

The following definitions have been developed to assist with establish responsibility for conducting fire investigations:

Level 1: Investigations in which origin and cause should be readily apparent or should be determined quickly with limited investigation. Given appropriate training and direction, Officers shall be responsible for and be able to conduct and document

a Level 1 fire investigation. Officers shall be able to recognize the need for additional investigation resources and shall be able to assist with Level 2 fire investigations, as directed by a FIT or senior fire investigator.

Examples of Level 1 fire investigations could include:

1. Any fire in which the origin and cause is readily apparent and can be identified and documented by a Company Officer or Acting Company Officer,
 - Fires causing little or no significant damage.
 - If possible fire code violations were related to the fire, the Officer should refer the incident to the LFRA Community Safety Division (CSD) for follow-up.
2. Any fire involving juveniles where the origin and cause can be readily identified and documented by the Officer and where the name(s) and contact information of juvenile suspect(s) can be determined and forwarded to CSD or appropriate local law enforcement agency.
 - The Officer shall request assistance from the on-duty FIT if the Officer suspects a fire of being incendiary in nature.

Level 2: Investigations in which special skills or knowledge may be required to determine origin, cause and responsibility. Given appropriate training and direction, a FIT shall be responsible for and be able to initiate and document a Level 2 fire investigation. The FIT shall be able to recognize the need for additional investigation resources and shall be able to work within an investigation team to investigate and document a Level 2 fire investigation, as directed by a senior fire investigator.

Examples of Level 2 fire investigations could include:

1. Any fire investigation that, by its nature, requires special technical knowledge, skills and/or resources not typically available to an Officer.
 - Any fire involving minor injury to civilians and/or LFRA personnel.
 - Any first alarm fire that extends beyond the initial area of fire origin to involve at least two fuel packages.
2. Any fire incident where it has been determined that a series of two or more fires have occurred in a given area or where the same “suspicious” individual(s) have been identified at other fires.
3. A fire incident where fire code violations have been determined to have been related to the fire origin and/or cause.

Level 3: Level 3 fire investigations involve fire and/or explosion incidents that are complex in nature. These incidents may have been caused by an unlawful act, involve serious bodily injuries and/or fatalities or represent high dollar loss. Given appropriate training and direction, a FIT shall be able to initiate a Level 3 fire investigation and recognize the need for additional investigation resources. The FIT shall be able to work within an investigation team to investigate and document a Level 3 fire investigation, as directed by a senior fire investigator. A senior fire investigator shall be able to facilitate and direct a Level 3 fire investigation team and prepare all necessary records and LFRA reports.

Examples of Level 3 fire investigations could include:

1. Any second alarm or greater fire incident.
2. Any incident involving explosions and/or explosives.
3. Any fire incident involving serious bodily injury and/or death of a civilian and/or LFRA personnel.

4. Any fire incident involving special and/or unique circumstances as determined by the incident commander.

Assembling an Investigation Team:

A fire investigation team may be as simple as the first due company officer or as complex as a multi-agency team of public-sector and private-sector investigators operating over several days. The assembly of an investigation team is based on the conditions, actions and resources available to the incident commander.

All investigations begin with the first arriving company officer. Officers are expected to be aware of issues they encounter that may be pertinent to any subsequent investigation activities, and be able to effectively communicate those issues to Incident Command. The FIT and all other LFRA fire investigators are expected to recognize incidents that exceed the scope of their training and/or experience and request additional resources, as dictated by the incident.

Availability of Additional Resources

The following personnel and/or agencies are available to assist with fire investigation needs within the LFRA response area. All requests for additional resources must be made by the incident commander, not the investigator.

- A. Fire investigators assigned to the Community Safety Division and off-duty current or former Fire Inspection Technicians are available to assist on an “as-needed” basis and should be the first choice for additional investigative personnel. The IC should contact Dispatch and request a “CSD All-Page” for available investigators to respond for incidents beyond the ability of the FIT.
 - When additional LFRA investigation resources arrive on scene, the IC should consider implementing an Investigation Group supervised by a senior fire investigator.
- B. Loveland Police Department (LPD) patrol officers, crime scene technicians and/or the on-call Detective may be able to assist with investigation needs. Patrol officers are often available to assist with canvassing an area, performing interviews and transporting collected evidence. Crime scene technicians are available to

collect and transport evidence. Detectives are available to coordinate larger-scale investigations, including criminal search warrants. The investigator and/or the IC should work with the LPD Patrol Supervisor to determine what LPD resources are needed and make appropriate requests.

- C. Larimer County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) employs several deputies and crime scene technicians who are highly trained and skilled fire investigators. If a fire incident occurs within the Loveland Rural Fire Protection District, the investigator and/or the IC should make contact with the senior LCSO deputy on scene to determine investigation responsibility and to coordinate resource needs.
- D. Larimer County Emergency Services (LCES) deputies are highly skilled wildland fire investigators. If a wildland fire incident occurs within the Loveland Rural Fire Protection District, at least one LCES deputy is often assigned to the call by LCSO Dispatch. The investigator should work with the on-scene LCES personnel to determine investigation responsibility and to coordinate resource needs.
- E. Larimer County Coroner's Officer is the agency with jurisdiction for all death investigation. In addition, a fatal fire must be initially treated as a possible crime scene. If a fire incident involves a fatality, the IC should contact Dispatch to request a Coroner's Office Investigator. Further, the IC should ensure that the appropriate local law enforcement agency is aware of the fatality and has personnel either on scene or responding.
- F. Fire investigators from neighboring mutual aid agencies may be able to provide additional assistance. Poudre Fire Authority has the greatest number of investigators, including two (2) on-duty FICs. Additional investigators may be available from Berthoud, Windsor/Severance, Johnstown/Milliken, Evans and/or Greeley. The IC should contact Dispatch and request a specific number of fire investigators from a specific agency.
- G. An Accelerant Detection K-9 (AK-9) can be requested through Dispatch if it is believed that any type of ignitable liquid may have been involved in the fire

incident. Local AK-9's should be considered before requesting the AK-9 with the Colorado Bureau of Investigation.

- H. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) has federal agents available to assist with complex fire investigation needs. The ATF jurisdiction does not typically extend to single- or two-family residential, but they may be interested in helping if their schedule allows. However, the ATF may choose to take jurisdiction for fires involving commercial structures, especially if arson is suspected. If the ATF sends an agent, s/he has the ability to mobilize their National Response Team. The IC can contact Dispatch and request that they contact the ATF for investigation assistance. The ATF will request detailed and specific information about the incident and investigation needs, so the investigator must provide sufficient information to the IC.
- I. Private fire investigators may be assigned by an insurance agency to investigate the fire incident for subrogation purposes. The property owner or responsible party must contact their insurance company in order to begin this process. If there are several affected persons, such as for a multi-family structure fire, there may be different private fire investigators assigned by different insurance companies.

For large-scale and/or very complex fire investigations where heavy equipment or other expensive resources may be needed to finish the investigation, the fire investigator may consider requesting that the property owner and/or responsible party contact their insurance company to expedite the assignment of a private fire investigator. At no time shall the investigator attempt to coerce or otherwise force any individual to comply with this type of request against their will.

Should a private fire investigator be assigned to a fire incident that was or is being investigated by LFRA personnel, the private fire investigator will typically contact the CSD and/or the investigator to obtain information about the incident. The CSD may release investigation and NFIRS reports in accordance with existing LFRA policies and procedures. Those LFRA personnel directly involved in the investigation may discuss the facts of the case, including their findings of origin

and cause, with the private fire investigator. Additionally, the LFRA Lead Investigator is encouraged to visit the fire incident scene with the private fire investigator when the private fire investigator conducts his/her origin and cause investigation.

Pursuant to the Colorado Arson Immunity Statute (10-4-1005 § C.R.S.), the Lead Fire Investigator should consider requesting the private fire investigator's final report and photographs through the submittal of a completed Request to Release Fire Investigation Reports form to the private fire investigator's primary office.

Reporting Requirements:

When a fire investigation is conducted, the minimum report shall include completion of the National Fire Information Reporting System (NFIRS) report, including all information within the "Fire Investigation" tab, using the agency's records management system. Typically, Level 1 fire investigations will be completed as an NFIRS report by the Company Officer. All other fire investigation reports shall be completed by the appropriate investigation personnel.

Fire investigations requiring documentation beyond the capabilities of the NFIRS report will be documented in both the complete NFIRS report, to be completed by the incident commander, and by the FIT or fire investigator designated as the Lead Investigator on an Investigation Report, which will be attached to the NFIRS report. A Supplemental Investigation Report shall be completed by each investigator involved with the investigation if their information cannot be accurately recorded in the Investigation Report.

Digital photographs taken as part of a fire investigation shall be stored electronically in the appropriate secure folder in the LFRA computer system. An additional copy of all digital photographs should be saved to a CD or other appropriate storage media and stored in a secure manner by the Community Safety Division.

Additional reports and/or documents collected during the investigation shall be scanned and stored electronically in the appropriate secure folder in the LFRA computer system. An additional copy of these reports and/or documents should be saved to a CD or other appropriate storage media and stored, along with the original reports and documents, in a secure manner by the Community Safety Division.

Revision History:

3/20/15 Update to current format, no changes in content.

References:

No references cited.