

**SUBJECT:** FIRE AND EXPLOSION SCENE INVESTIGATIONS**SECTION:** 301.22**REVISED:** JANUARY 12, 2012**PAGE(S):** 3

## PURPOSE

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- A. To ensure the investigation of all fires and explosions occurring within the jurisdictional area of the City of Reading.
- B. To initiate a system of fire investigation which begins at company level and progresses to upper organizational levels, as necessary, based on the situation involving an emergency incident.
- C. To establish guidelines for assistance to determine the origin and cause, resulting in who or what was responsible and reasons for the occurrence.
- D. To provide policy, guidelines, and procedures relative to the fire investigation process at the company level.

## POLICY

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- A. It shall be the policy of the department to investigate the cause, origin, and circumstances of each major fire, as determined by the rules of the fire marshal as per; O.R.C. §3737.24 *Investigation of Cause of Fires*, O.R.C. §737.27 *Investigation of Fires*. O.A.C §1301:7-7-01§104.10.2 defines a major fire as, a fire or explosion that caused or had a substantial risk of causing death or serious physical harm to any persons or damage to or the destruction of any occupancy, property or vehicle. O.R.C. §3737.24 requires the investigating officer to notify the Fire Marshall forthwith. Forthwith means, immediately.
- B. Company officers should initiate the investigation of those fires that they respond to within the city limits.
- C. Company officers/Incident Commanders should request a fire investigator whenever any of the following circumstances exist:
  - 1. Arson, incendiary, or suspicious fires.
    - a. The presence of incendiary plants, trailers, or devices (electrical, chemical, mechanical).
    - b. Multiple origins or un-communicated fires.
    - c. Prior or habitual fires.
    - d. Fires at unusual and suspicious hours.
    - e. Fires preceded by apparent preparation, such as the removal of contents or the absence of contents that are usually found in that type of occupancy.
    - f. Fires which burn or injure the occupants.
    - g. Unusual conditions and locations of burnings.
    - h. Suspicious comments and actions of the occupant.
    - i. Condemned property or proceedings for removal of a structure.
    - j. Fires prior to/ or during redecoration or renovation.

- k. Fires where damaged or pre-burned contents are found.
  - l. Fires of property listed for sale.
  - m. Fires discovered by habitual persons.
  - n. Fires possibly connected to riots, racial, or civil disturbance.
  - o. Fires that may have been used to conceal other crimes.
  - p. Fires recently preceded by acts of vandalism.
  - q. Vehicle fires involving any combination of two compartments (engine, passenger, trunk/payload area) which does not appear to have commuted under normal circumstances.
  - r. Fires that occur on or involve City, State or Federal property, with notification being made to same.
- 2. Evidence or suspicions of any crime having occurred in connection with the emergency incident.
  - 3. Fires resulting in fatalities of any persons.
  - 4. Fires in connection with or resulting from an explosion or the manufacturing of explosive devices.
  - 5. Fires or responses to clandestine lab operations.
  - 6. Major fires with significant property or monetary losses.
  - 7. When a building is in danger of fire or the setting of a fire has been threatened or plotted, whether or not a fire has occurred.
  - 8. Incidents which, in the opinion of the Company Officer, may result in a lawsuit or have legal ramifications.
  - 9. Any situation not specifically mentioned, but in the opinion of the Company Officer, a fire investigation is needed or when a clear origin and cause can not be determined.
- D. Fire Department Investigators should be requested via the Reading Dispatch Center following the call-out procedure listed in the Dispatcher's FD Resource Manual.
  - E. Whenever a fire investigator has been requested by the Company Officer and the dispatcher is unable to contact an investigator, the Company Officer may request a consult with the Central Team Captain of the Hamilton County Arson Taskforce (HCAT), or a response of the Central investigative team of HCAT. HCAT can be activated by contacting the Hamilton County Communications Center.
  - F. If needed additional specialized resources may be requested from the Reading Police and Service Departments, Ohio Fire Marshal's Office, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation and Identification (BCI&I), the Bureau of Alcohol-Tobacco & Firearms (ATF) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).
  - G. Evidence should be collected and secured following the procedures set forth by the Hamilton County Coroner's Lab.
  - H. All inquiries made by private and/or insurance investigators shall be referred to the Fire Chief or the reporting Fire Investigator of said incident.
  - I. Outside resources may be considered for incidents which involve the property/implication of City of Reading employees or elected officials.
  - J. Fire investigation reports shall be maintained by the Fire Prevention Bureau.

- K. All fires and explosions that cause (a) death or serious injury or (b) large property loss fires and explosions (large for the community in which they occur) must now be immediately reported to the Division of State Fire Marshal via phone by calling 800-589-2728

## PROCEDURE

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- A. During fire fighting operations, be alert for conditions which may indicate incendiarism.
- B. Initiate fire investigation procedures as soon as possible after knock-down and before overhaul.
- C. Secure the incident scene and perimeter, entry of un-authorized persons shall be prohibited.
- D. If it is determined that a crime has occurred, an entry point will be established. All entry into the crime scene will be made through this single point and all personnel entering or exiting shall be logged. Only essential personnel will be granted access into the area. Care should be taken by all personnel to maintain the original integrity of the crime scene.
- E. Endeavor, first, to determine the point/area of origin.
- F. Endeavor to determine the cause of the fire.
- G. Conduct overhaul operations with care as directed by the officer in charge/fire investigator during the investigation activities.
- H. Preserve all evidence in the location and position found until an investigator arrives.
- I. Limit discussion of the incident and particulars associated with the investigation to fire and police investigative personnel only.
- J. Request a fire investigator, as per this policy.
- K. Limit overhaul operations as far as may be practical until the arrival of the investigator.

## RESPONSIBILITY

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- A. It is the overall responsibility of the Incident Commander to make certain that the on-scene fire investigation is being conducted.
- B. The Officer in Charge (O.I.C.) or Company Officers, that are conducting a fire investigation, are responsible for requesting a fire investigator whenever such circumstances may exist, as described in this policy
- C. It is the responsibility of all Officers and Fire Fighters to be alert for any evidence which may aid in the investigation and to preserve such evidence until it can be properly collected and secured.