

SCOTTS VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT



STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES DATE APPROVED: APPROVED:	ARTICLE: III	SOP: 3200
	SECTION: 3200 FIRE INVESTIGATION	
	SUBJECT: FIRE INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES	
	January 4, 2012	
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Purpose: To provide procedures for the investigation of fires within the Scotts Valley Fire Protection District, to other fire agencies under the mutual aid plan, and to assist law enforcement in fire-related matters.

Scope: It shall be the responsibility of the fire chief, or his/her designee, to investigate promptly the cause, origin, and circumstances of each and every fire occurring within the Scotts Valley Fire Protection District pursuant to these procedures.

Definitions:

Level I:

Fire investigations that can be conducted by engine company personnel. A fire scene which requires minimum effort or experience to identify origin and cause. Examples are: cooking fires, malfunctioning mechanical equipment, fire from vehicle accidents, etc. Level I does not require a formal fire investigation report; however, **it is essential that fire cause and origin be documented in the narrative section of the incident report.**

Level II:

A fire in this category requires a qualified fire district investigator because of a death/injury, high monetary loss, suspicious fire or combination. It will require a detailed and thorough investigation of the fire scene to determine cause and origin. The investigator must prepare a fire investigation report, collect evidence and effectively deal with outside investigators and agencies for appropriate conclusion of the fire investigation.

Level III:

A fire or series of fires that will require resources from outside the fire district. The on-scene fire district fire investigator, through the incident commander, may request assistance from outside agency resources. For activation of the Santa Cruz County Arson Task Force utilize the procedures outlined in Policy 3208 of the Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs Association. (santacruzfirechiefs.org) Other outside agencies that may be requested include the California State Fire Marshal Arson Bomb Unit (Contact CalFire ECC) and/or ATF - Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (408) 882-5250.

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Procedure:

1. Authority

- 1.1. Team members shall be under the administrative authority of the Fire Investigation Battalion Chief.
- 1.2. Team members shall function as an investigation group within the scope of the Incident Command System.
- 1.3. Team members are granted the power of a peace officer when carrying out their responsibilities as a fire investigator pursuant to §830.37 of the California Penal Code.
- 1.4. The incident commander shall have the responsibility to see that all fires are investigated and a written report filed with the Fire Investigation Battalion Chief.

2. Requirements of Team Members

- 2.1. Successful completion of California Fire Service Training and Education System (CFSTES) Fire Investigation 1A, 1B, 1C (PC 832), or equivalent.
- 2.2. Willing to complete courses to maintain skills in fire investigation techniques.
- 2.3. Desirable courses include, but are not limited to, report writing, photography, building construction and electrical wiring.
- 2.4. The district will, as much as possible, provide training for fire investigation members. It is the responsibility of each individual to stay current on fire scene investigation techniques, laws, enforcement, and courtroom procedures.

3. Incident Commander Duties and Responsibilities

- 3.1. The incident commander shall be responsible for the initiation of the investigation of the cause, origin, and circumstances of fires within the Scotts Valley Fire Protection District.
- 3.2. The incident commander shall be responsible for determining the level of fire investigation needed for each incident.
- 3.3. Incident commander should call for a fire investigator when any one or more of the following exists:
 - 3.3.1. Fire involving death or injury, including fire district personnel.
 - 3.3.2. Fire of a suspicious nature.
 - 3.3.3. When fire cause cannot be determined by the on-scene fire officer.

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3.3.4. Large monetary loss.

4. Fire Investigator Call-Out Procedures

- 4.1. Depending on the size and scope of the investigation, it may be necessary to have two or more investigators respond to the scene. When this happens, a lead investigator will be determined by the incident commander.
- 4.2. Any fire requiring a Level 2 investigation occurring during normal business hours, Monday through Friday between 0730 and 1630 hours, the Incident Commander shall attempt to contact the Fire Marshal to conduct the fire investigation.
- 4.3. Any fire requiring a level 2 fire investigation occurring outside normal business hours, the Incident Commander shall first attempt to make contact with an **off-duty** Scotts Valley Fire Investigator via home telephone or cell phone.
- 4.4. If no **off-duty** Scotts Valley Fire Investigator is available, utilize the **on-duty** shift fire investigator. The incident commander shall make appropriate arrangements in regards to staffing in order to fill the need.
 - 4.4.1. If there is no **SVFD** fire investigator available, the Incident Commander should request assistance from the Santa Cruz County Arson Task Force utilizing Policy 3208 of the Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs Association. (santacruzfirechiefs.org). In the event a Task Force investigator is used without a SVFD investigator present, the Incident Commander will assume the lead in the investigation.
- 4.5. If the Incident Commander and/or fire investigator determine that the fire investigation task force is needed, the IC should request the Task Force Leader be paged, and contact the Incident Commander via phone or Command Net.

5. Fire Investigator Duties and Responsibilities

- 5.1. The fire investigator shall be responsible for securing and performing initial on - scene investigation and related activities. He/she shall keep the incident commander informed of progress and shall make requests for additional assistance through the incident commander.
- 5.2. The Fire Investigation Battalion Chief shall be advised of the investigation at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.3. The fire investigator is responsible for any follow-up investigations necessary to conclude cause and origin determination.
- 5.4. Members of the district shall not carry a firearm for any reason during the conduct of any fire investigation and/or other official duty.

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- 5.5. Criminally or maliciously caused fires shall be turned over to the appropriate law enforcement agency or the District Attorney.
- 5.6. Fires caused by juveniles should be closely evaluated and should be referred to our *Juvenile Fire Setter Program* when possible.
- 5.7. Mutual aid requests from other fire agencies are to be authorized at the discretion of the duty chief. The Fire Investigation Battalion Chief shall be notified at the earliest opportunity.

6. Reports

- 6.1. The lead on-scene investigator shall be responsible for the preparation of the fire investigation report and all related documents.
- 6.2. The investigation report shall be completed as soon as possible after the completion of the investigation. Normally within 7 days of the incident. If more time is needed due to the complexity of the incident, the lead investigator must notify the Fire Investigation Battalion Chief.
- 6.3. The investigation report format shall be completed in the District RMS system known as Firehouse.
- 6.4. The investigator shall utilize the Investigation module, and complete all tabs.
- 6.5. All photos shall be attached to the investigation report in the 'Photos' tab and documented appropriately.
- 6.6. All floor plans and sketches shall be scanned or saved as a PDF file and attached to the report under the 'Other>Attachments & Signatures' tab.
 - 6.6.1. The 'Copy to Databse' box shall also be checked.
- 6.7. Upon completion of the Fire Investigation Report, the lead investigator shall notify the Fire Investigation Battalion Chief that the report is ready for review.
- 6.8. Fire investigation reports will be classified as follows:
 - 6.8.1. Criminal – Confidential
 - 6.8.2. Juvenile – Confidential
 - 6.8.3. Accidental – Public

All requests for fire investigation reports and related documents shall be requested through and released by the Fire Investigation Battalion Chief or the Training Battalion Chief.