


SOG# 501-2	Standard Operating Guideline		
	Cumberland Road Fire Department Inc. <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;">Fire Investigations</div>	Approved By	
		Steven Parrish, Fire Chief	
		Effective Date	Revised Date
		9-8-2023	

Purpose:

To establish a uniform procedure for the investigation of all fires occurring within the jurisdiction of the Cumberland Road Fire Department (CRFD) pursuant to NC GS 58-79-1. Information gathered through an investigation is part of the risk reduction process for the community. Members of the CRFD will be governed by the following standard operating procedure for the specified operations.

Definitions:

Arson- 1st Degree - If the building burned was occupied at the time of burning, the offense is arson in the first degree and punishable as a Class D Felony. (NC GS 14-58)

Arson- 2nd Degree- If the building burned was unoccupied at the time of burning, the offense is arson in the second degree, and is punishable as a Class G Felony. (NC GS 14-58)

Definition of "house" and "building."- The terms "house" and "building" shall be defined to include mobile and manufactured-type housing and recreational trailers. (1973, c. 1374.) (NC GS 14-58.1.)


CCSO Arson - A unit staffed for fire investigations that is operated and staffed by the Cumberland County Sherriff's Office.

Fire Investigation- The process of determining the origin, cause, and development of fire or explosion.

Fire Investigator- A member of CRFD who is approved by the fire chief to conduct origin and cause and determination investigations.

Fire Investigator Apprentice- A member of CRFD who has an interest in fire and explosion investigations who can assist with fire investigations under the supervision of an approved fire investigator designated by the fire chief.

Forensic ID technicians- Police or Sherriff's deputies who are trained in photography, evidence collection and preservation.

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NFPA 921 Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations- A nationally recognized guide for rendering accurate opinions as to the origin, cause, responsibility, and prevention of fires.

Witness- Any individual with firsthand information relative to the origin and cause of a fire.

Cause-The circumstance, conditions, or agencies that brought about or resulted in the fire or explosion incident, damage to property resulting from the fire or explosion incident, or bodily injury or loss of life resulting from the fire or explosion incident.

Origin- The general location where a fire or explosion began.

Scientific Method- The systematic pursuit of knowledge involving the recognition and definition of a problem; the collection of data through observation and experimentation; analysis of the data; the formulation, evaluation and testing of a hypothesis; and when possible, the selection of a final hypothesis.


Incendiary Fire- A fire that is deliberately set with the intent to cause the fire to occur in an area where fire should not be.

(Additional official fire investigation definitions can be found in NFPA 921, Chapter 3 page 921-19.)

Policy:

All fires in the CRFD district shall be investigated pursuant to North Carolina General Statute 58-79-1. The responsibility for determining the area of origin and cause of the fire belongs to the Incident Commander (IC).

Procedure:

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Section 1. Initial Scene Responsibilities

- A. The IC in charge of the fire ground shall be responsible for ensuring the completion of an investigation. The IC may designate a qualified individual to complete or assist with the completion of the origin and cause investigation.


- B. Fire suppression personnel shall be responsible for securing the fire scene, maintaining strict security, and scene preservation until the origin and cause investigation is completed. The law enforcement agency having jurisdiction should be requested to assist with the security of the fire scene, traffic control, or civilian problems that may occur. Security of the scene shall stay in place until the investigation is completed.

- C. Structure contents shall not be moved or disturbed before the origin and cause has been determined, except to effectively extinguish and contain the fire. Overhaul activities shall be limited to that which is necessary to prevent the reoccurrence of the fire.

- D. All personnel should be cognizant of any difficulties encountered while extinguishing the fire. Firefighters must keep a mental note of which windows or doors were open, closed, locked, or unlocked during suppression operations, and report all findings to the IC. Difficulty gaining entry, objects in odd places, or things that don't seem normal should be brought to the attention of the IC and/or investigator. Firefighters might encounter unusual fire behavior or detect odors that might be associated with the presence of ignitable liquids.

- E. Any request for an additional agency (i.e., State Bureau of Investigation, Office of the State Fire Marshal, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms Etc.) to assist with the origin and cause investigation shall be communicated with the incident commander as well as the law enforcement agency with jurisdiction.


- F. Civilians shall be restricted from any fire scene until the investigation is completed. The IC will not allow civilians back on the property until the investigation is completed and the scene is safe for them to return.

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- G. Information as to the origin and cause, and other pertinent information concerning the fire investigation shall be considered confidential and not released to the media, spectators, etc., except as directed by the Fire Chief or his/her designee.
- H. Civilians and personnel not involved with the suppression or investigation of the fire shall be restricted from any fire scene until the investigation is completed and the scene is safe for them to return.
- I. Information as to the origin and cause, and other pertinent information concerning the fire investigation shall be considered confidential and not released to the media, spectators, etc. Except as directed by the Fire Chief or his designee.
- J. Information gathered relating to the incident response shall be documented in the appropriate RMS software by the IC as soon as possible after completion of the incident. This shall include documenting the names, ages, and any information of all persons involved at the scene.
- K. Information gathered relating specifically to the investigation shall be documented in the appropriate RMS software and investigation folder, and in the investigators case file as the information is gathered.
- L. All information should be documented and entered into the RMS as soon as the investigator has exhausted all efforts in gathering information, statements, and evidence that is available and pertinent to the investigation.
- M. The investigation report and all information gathered shall be completed within a reasonable time period **to be specified by the fire chief.**
- N. Upon completion of the investigation report a peer review shall be conducted by an additional investigator prior to a technical review being completed by the fire chief or his designee.

Section 2: Fire deaths

- A. Fire fatalities shall be considered a homicide until ruled otherwise by law enforcement. Until that determination is made, the fire scene shall be treated as a crime scene.

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- B. The lead fire investigator shall request the response of the appropriate agencies through the Incident Commander to include but not limited to, CCSO, NCSBI, ATF and other possible agencies.
- C. The Incident Commander and the Lead Investigator will ensure the security of the scene and of the deceased. Limit movement as much as possible in the area. A written log must be kept of all persons who enter and leave the scene with date, name, time in and time out, and reason for entry/assigned task.
- D. DO NOT cover the deceased with sheets, blankets, etc. This will help prevent any cross contamination from the material onto the deceased. Barriers should be placed to block the media or bystanders from taking pictures if the deceased is in the open.
- E. Under no circumstances will any CRFD members (other than investigators gathering information to assist with the investigation) talk to the media, family members, occupants, or bystanders about the deceased. Personnel shall refrain from speculating on the cause of death. The Incident Commander or Public Information Officer will determine when and what type of information can be asked or released.
- F. All field notes, sketches, and statements will be collected by the Lead Fire Investigator or designee to be placed in the report folder for that incident.

Section 3: Juveniles

- A. When conducting an origin and cause investigation involving juveniles at the fire scene, investigators shall conduct the origin and cause investigation in the same manner as if it was an adult with one exception: consent must be obtained from a parent or guardian prior to conducting an interview or obtaining a statement. The consent may be verbal or written consent. The date, time, and person giving consent must be documented.
- B. Information related to juvenile involvements should be documented in the proper locations in the RMS. The life safety educator, fire marshal, and juvenile detective should be notified of any juveniles suspected of or admitting to setting a fire via email as well to ensure appropriate interventions occur.

Responsibility:

It shall be the responsibility of each member of the department and supervisors to ensure that the provisions of this standard are followed.

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