

# COLUMBIA FIRE DEPARTMENT

## Fire Investigations OPS-011

### Standard Operating Guidelines Manual

**RESCINDS:** "Notifying Marshal 1 of All City Investigations" 11/05/91 and "Notification of Fire Investigator" 6/30/93.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that the points of origin and causes of all fires are identified to the extent possible so that accurate information can be maintained for budgeting, fire prevention and other uses, and to ensure that arson fires are identified and proper follow-up occurs.

**SCOPE:** All Suppression and Investigation Personnel

#### **I POLICY:**

A. The incident commander is responsible for determining the point of origin and cause of a fire. Under certain circumstances the IC will need additional assistance. A Fire Investigator should be called to the following incidents.

1. Death or Serious Injury: A fire death or serious injury not related to a vehicle accident.
2. Major Fire: A fire that could exceed a \$100,000 loss even if the cause is known.
3. Arson: A fire that is determined to be incendiary. (See below for fires in abandoned houses, repeated minor incidents and vandalism.)
4. Cause Difficult to Determine: A fire where an accidental cause cannot be determined by fire suppression personnel.

5. Suspect Present or Known:  
An incendiary fire, regardless  
of size or type, with a suspect  
present or known.

6. False Alarm: A malicious  
false alarm with a suspect  
present or known. (Also  
notify the Police Department  
or Sheriff's Department.)

B. Resources do not permit the investigation of woods fires  
or car fires unless there is a serious injury or fatality not  
related to a vehicle accident.

C. In the case of repeated minor incidents (trash or brush  
fires that appear to be linked and minor vandalism fires)  
and fires in abandoned houses, notify the Police  
Department if in the City or the Sheriff's Department if  
outside the City. Then, notify the Fire Prevention Bureau  
during the next business day.

D. In cases where a serious code violation (locked exit,  
inoperable sprinkler system, etc.) is discovered, notify the  
respective City or County Fire Marshal.

E. For situations not described above, call the Fire  
Investigator, the City Fire Marshal, County Fire Marshal,  
Columbia Police Department or Richland County Sheriff's  
Department as the situation warrants. In the city, the City  
Fire Investigator should be notified. Outside the city, the  
Richland County Fire Investigator should be notified.  
Anytime the City Fire Investigator is called to respond to  
an incident, Columbia Central shall also notify the City Fire  
Marshal (Marshal 1)

F. "F-8" is to be used to request a fire investigator over the  
radio. "10-60" shall be used to notify the Corinor.

G. When a fire investigator is called, the company officer  
should fill out the incident report in all areas except those  
relating to the cause of the fire, unless the investigator  
provides instructions on what to report. Where an  
investigation is continuing, write "Under Investigation by  
(Agency Name)" [This is now on the Prober Chief system]  
in the Ignition Factor box. Upon completing an

investigation, the investigator will submit a change report to update the original incident report.

## **II CITY FIRE SCENE INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES:**

A. The investigator will notify Columbia Central via radio when responding to incident.

B. Upon arrival at the scene, the investigator will notify Columbia Central.

C. The investigator will immediately confer with the incident commander to receive information regarding the situation.

D. The investigator will secure the scene and coordinate efforts of suppression forces to protect the area of origin from further damage.

E. The investigator will complete a Consent to Search form prior to investigating if the owner or occupant is available.

F. The fire investigator will be equipped with appropriate protective clothing when conducting fire investigations and when on the incident scene during suppression operations.

G. The fire investigator will request Suppression Bureau equipment and resources through the incident commander as necessary to conduct investigations.

H. If the Fire Investigator determines an incident to be of incendiary origin, the Columbia Police Department's arson investigator will be notified.

I. The investigator will be responsible for coordinating the collection of evidence, photographs, and forensics.

J. Upon termination of a fire scene investigation, the investigator will be responsible for releasing the property and scene to the owner or occupant. The investigator will complete measures to reasonably secure the property in the event that the owner or occupant is unavailable.

## **V CITY FIRE INVESTIGATION FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES:**

A. All arson-related fire investigations involving multiple jurisdictions will be coordinated by the City fire investigator.

B. Statements, interviews, and follow-up investigations should be conducted by a two-member team consisting of the CFD Fire Investigator and the assigned CPD investigator, whenever feasible.

C. In the event a two-member team is not available, the fire investigator shall notify Columbia Central via radio concerning the nature of assignments and locations. The investigator will notify Columbia Central upon termination of assignment.

D. The investigator will review cases with the Fire Marshal prior to issuing a warrant or making an arrest. Due to circumstances where this is not feasible, the Fire Marshal shall be notified as soon as possible.

E. All information concerning arrests, warrants and items involving possible news media releases shall be submitted in writing to the Fire Marshal to be forwarded to the Assistant Chief in charge of public information.

## **VI ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:**

A. All applicable investigation information shall be entered into the investigation log book as soon as possible. Richland County investigator's monthly reports will be entered into the log book at end of the month when they are submitted.

B. A fire investigation report shall be completed promptly after each fire scene investigation. Additional information shall include applicable times, fire suppression activities, and insurance information. A copy of the incident report shall be attached to the investigation report. The investigation report will be completed by the City fire investigator regardless of case jurisdictional responsibilities. Each investigation report will be filed in an independent jacket. Reports will be reviewed and initialed by the Fire Marshal. Supplemental forms shall include continuing investigation work, time involved and all information pertinent to cases.

C. A daily activity report will be completed indicating the number of hours involved in each case. This daily activity report will correspond with supplemental forms to substantiate all work involved.

D. Fires of incendiary nature shall be photographed and remain in the case jacket.

E. Fire investigation scenes of incendiary or suspicious nature will be sketched to include the following,

1. Location.
2. Date.
3. Investigator's signature.
4. Arrow pointing North.
5. Point of origin.
6. Electrical and gas service.
8. Not to scale notation.
9. Other pertinent information necessary for litigation.
10. Street intersection.
11. Adjoining structures, if damaged by fire exposure.

F. Monthly reports will be completed and submitted to the Fire Marshal on the first normal working day of each month.

G. Monthly reports involving cases investigated by Richland County will be filed in one jacket corresponding to the applicable month. These reports shall be filed within the City Fire Investigator's monthly case files.

H. All applicable data regarding an investigation shall be keyed into the Arson Information Management System (AIMS) as the investigation report is started and updated.

## **VII FIRE INVESTIGATOR EQUIPMENT:**

- A. It is the responsibility of the fire investigator to maintain all equipment in a clean and operable condition.
- B. A current inventory of all City-issued equipment shall be retained on file. Corresponding serial numbers will be included for applicable equipment. All Richland County issued equipment shall be included within this inventory list and so designated.
- C. All equipment will be labeled accordingly. (C.F.D. Investigator)
- D. An inspection and inventory of all equipment will be conducted at least semiannually (January and July) to insure proper maintenance and availability. This inspection will be conducted by the Fire Marshal or someone appointed by him or her.
- E. Any loss or damage to equipment shall be promptly reported to the Fire Marshal. This report shall be in writing using the applicable form.

## **VIII FIRE INVESTIGATOR LAW ENFORCEMENT PROCEDURES:**

- A. Columbia Fire Department personnel who are commissioned as Richland County Deputy Sheriffs shall adhere to all policies and applicable laws concerning this commission.
- B. All firearms and ammunition shall be securely locked in a designated location when not being carried by the officer.