

COLUMBIA FIRE DEPARTMENT

Richland County Arson Task Force OPS-012

Standard Operating Guidelines Manual

PURPOSE: The Richland County Arson Task Force is a team of investigators with resources to apply high intensity investigative efforts to an arson incident or series of incidents. It's purpose is to:

1. Determine the cause and origin of each fire at the request of a participating agency.
2. Provide follow-up investigation in those fires determined to be arson, to include apprehension and prosecution.
3. Develop and share information about arsonists, their methods of operation and allied criminal activities.
4. Develop investigative techniques, provide automatic and timely investigation of the circumstances surrounding an arson incident.

I PARTICIPATING AGENCIES:

Columbia Fire Department

Columbia Police Department

Forest Acres Police Department

Insurance News Service

Irmo Fire District

Irmo Police Department

Richland County Coroner's Office

Richland County Fire Marshal/Department of Emergency Services

Richland County Sheriff's Department

Richland County Solicitor's Office

S.C. Law Enforcement Division

U.S. Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms

II PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS BY AGENCY:

A. Columbia Fire Department:

1. City Fire Chief
2. City Fire Marshal
3. Assigned Fire Investigator

B. Columbia Police Department:

1. On-call Forensic Officer
2. On-call Criminal Investigator

C. Forest Acres Police Department:

1. On-call Criminal Investigator

D. Irmo Fire District:

1. On-call Fire Investigator

E. Irmo Police Department:

1. On-call Criminal Investigator

F. Richland County Coroner's Office:

1. On-call Coroner

G. Richland County Fire Marshal/Department of
Emergency Services:

1. County Fire Marshal
2. Assigned Arson Investigator/EOD
certified

3. On-call Arson Investigator/EOD certified

4. On-call Arson Investigator/HazMat certified

H. Richland County Sheriff,s Department:

1. On-call Forensic Officer

2. On-call EOD Investigators (2 on-duty)

3. On-call Criminal Investigator

4. On-call Polygraph Examiner

I. Richland County Solicitor's Office:

1. Assigned Assistant Solicitor

J. SC Law Enforcement Division

1. As requested

K. US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms

1. As requested

III OPERATING PROCEDURES:

A. Upon identifying a probable arson, the incident commander (IC) will request Columbia Central to notify the on-call fire investigator and the appropriate law enforcement agency. Central will confirm to the IC that the fire investigator has been notified and is responding. The IC will automatically request a fire investigator on any scene involving fatalities or serious injury.

B. The fire investigator will report to the IC at the scene for initial briefing and will determine if the incident can be worked with the resources available or if the task force should be activated.

C. The responding law enforcement agency will complete its normal report following prescribed agency procedures. It is suggested that the report be given an "other response"

heading at this time (rather than arson) until the investigation can determine origin and cause.

IV TASK FORCE ACTIVATION:

A. The Richland County Lieutenant for Arson Investigation will serve as Task Force Coordinator.

B. The investigator will contact and confer with the arson task force coordinator. The investigator will brief the coordinator on the circumstances and the reasons why the task force should be activated. The most common reason will be that the investigative requirements are beyond the available resources at the scene. (Large commercial fire, multiple fatalities, etc.)

C. The task force coordinator will activate the necessary elements of the task force (especially those who will work the scene.) Roles and responsibilities are assigned according to the incident command system. If there is a fatality, major commercial fire, explosion or any unusual circumstances involving a fire scene, the coordinator should be notified.

D. A task force meeting will be held to review initial findings and to assess the situation. Decisions will be made regarding how to proceed with the investigation.

E. Specific investigative assignments will be made.

F. Investigative teams will work their assignments. When the teams complete their assignments (including paperwork) they may be assigned other duties or be released back to their own agencies.

G. If the incident warrants, the task force will set up an incident command post at or near the scene.

H. A re-assessment meeting will be held a day or two after the incident to review progress and set the course of the follow-up investigation.

I. Investigators will receive follow-up assignments.

J. On-scene activities will be completed and the scene released.

K. Investigative operations will continue with the focus toward the follow-up investigation.

L. With sufficient investigative progress, the case can be cleared or given "pending status." Investigations cannot continue indefinitely. Periodic meetings will re-assess case status and direction.

M. A post-investigation critique of the case and task force performance will be held to review results and recommend changes or improvements.

N. Cooperating agencies and jurisdictions are informed of the progress and disposition of the case so that they can see the effects of their participation.

V ACTIVATION POLICIES:

A. Task force activation needs to balance the need for quick response with the reality that fireground conditions may restrict investigations. This should begin with the IC's request for the on-call investigator and continue with the investigator's request for task force assistance. (The investigator should consider what current conditions and time factors are before a full scale investigation can begin.)

B. All task force investigations will be conducted with either written consent to search or a criminal search warrant.

C. Investigations will be conducted in accordance with established rules of evidence collection and criminal investigative procedures. The solicitor's office will be consulted on any legal issues that are in doubt.

CHAIN OF COMMAND

ARSON TASK FORCE

INVESTIGATOR

OPERATIONS PLANNING LOGISTICS

LEAD INVESTIGATOR

SECURITY RECORDS MANAGEMENT SUPPLIES

FIRE SCENE PROCESSING CASE REVIEW COMMUNICATION

CASE MANAGEMENT CASE DOCUMENTATION SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

FOLLOW-UP-LEGAL LIAISON EVIDENCE CUSTODY

SPECIAL OPERATIONS

INTELLIGENCE