

Union County Standard Operating Guidelines  
**Fireground Operations**

**Fireground Operations, SOG 3.44**

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**FIRE SCENE INVESTIGATIONS**

1. Intent and Purpose

To ensure the investigation of all fires occurring within the jurisdictional area of UCFD's. To provide policy and guidelines relative to the fire investigation process.

2. Policy

- a. It shall be the policy of UCFD's to make every effort to determine the origin and cause of all fires.
- b. Company Officers shall initiate the investigation of those fires that they respond to within their fire districts.
- c. Company Officers shall request a fire investigator via the IC (Officer in charge of the scene) whenever any of the following circumstances exist: Arson, unknown origin and/or unknown cause, or suspicious fires as well as the following:
  - Evidence or suspicions of any crime having occurred in connection with the emergency incident.
  - Fires resulting in fatalities/injuries of any persons.
  - Fires in connection or resulting from an explosion.
  - Major fires with significant property or monetary losses.
  - Fires that cause significant damage to UCFD's equipment and/or apparatus.
  - Incidents that, in the opinion of the Company Officer, may result in a lawsuit or have legal ramifications.
  - Any situation not specifically mentioned, but in the opinion of the Company Officer, a fire investigation is needed.
- d. Whenever a fire investigator has been requested by the Company Officer and the fire alarm office is unable to contact an investigator, the Company Officer shall request the response of the Departments Chief Officer(s).

3. Responsibility

- a. It is the responsibility of the IC to make certain that the on-scene fire investigation is being conducted.
- b. The IC or Company Officers, that are conducting a fire investigation, are responsible for requesting a fire investigator whenever such circumstances may exist.
- c. It is the responsibility of all Officers and Firefighters to be alert for any evidence, which may aid in the investigation and to preserve such evidence until it can be properly secured and collected. **Overhaul should be kept to a minimum so as not to disturb evidence.**

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- d. When suspicion or knowledge of arson becomes evident, steps should be taken to maintain control of the premises until examination and removal of evidence is completed (i.e. fire department personnel left at the scene).
- e. UCFD's personnel should not disclose impressions or thoughts as to the cause of the fire where bystanders may overhear them.

4. Procedure

- During fire fighting operations, be alert for conditions that may indicate incendiaries.
- Initiate fire investigation procedures as soon as possible after knockdown and before overhaul.
- Endeavor, first, to determine point of origin.
- Endeavor to determine cause of fire and/or explosion.
- Conduct overhaul operations with care as directed by the Officer-in-Charge during the investigation activities.
- Preserve all evidence that may be found.
- Request a fire investigator, as per this guideline.
- Secure overhaul operations as far as may be practical until the arrival of the investigator.

Note: If overhaul is needed and it is practical, taking a photograph(s) prior to overhauling is advised.

- a. Observe owners/occupants and bystanders reactions and comments. Pay attention to their clothing and its conditions (i.e. are they dressed for what they say they were doing?).
- b. UCFD's personnel shall document the description, identification of any witnesses and potential witnesses present at the scene. Written statements should be taken from such if attainable. UCFD's personnel should document the license numbers of any vehicles present at the fire scene if arson is suspected.
- c. If there has been a series of fires, pay attention to the people at the scene. Who reported the fire? Who attempted rescue or suppression, and who offered information? Try to observe the reaction of the crowd. Get a photograph of the crowd if possible, including vehicles.
- d. All fireground personnel should note bystanders at the scene of a fire.
- e. Photographs of the crowd should be encouraged at all major fires. Noting license plate numbers of vehicles parked at the scene or those leaving as the FD arrives can also provide valuable information to investigators.

5. Fire Investigator

- a. Upon receiving the first notification that an investigator is needed, the investigator should attempt to gather as much information about the fire as possible. Some of the information the investigator should gather is:
  - ✓ Location of fire.
  - ✓ Time of fire.
  - ✓ Unit or agency requesting investigator.

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- ✓ If there are any fire department units on the scene.
  - ✓ Location and designation of the Command Post.
  - ✓ Whether the fire is suspicious.
  - ✓ If there are any injuries or fatalities.
  - ✓ If law enforcement is on the scene.
- b. The investigator should urge the IC to limit any overhaul until the investigator has had a chance to observe the scene.