

No. 3: Fire Cause & Origin

Introduction

Even though firefighting is a tough and dirty job, there are times that we need to be more ginger in our tactics; when it comes to preserving evidence for the fire investigation.

Often times the investigators arrive well after the firefighters and have to rely heavily on information obtained from the crews that were first on scene. Therefore, all firefighters arriving on a fireground should be thinking along the lines of "what will the investigators need from me?" This gathering of information should begin as soon as you arrive on scene, during firefighting operations, and paying particular attention after the fire has been knocked down while providing some added care during overhaul so as not to disturb evidence.

To prepare members for this training, be sure to cover all department's SOG's along with any additional information which can be provided by the fire investigation unit.

Information to Obtain on Arrival

1. Was there anyone leaving the area upon arrival
2. Condition of the structure: have doors or windows been forced prior to the fire department's arrival
3. Did you encounter any barriers deterring or slowing fire operations
4. What is the extent and intensity of the fire
5. What color are the smoke and flames
6. Are there any signs of a discarded fuel container

Information to be Observing During Operations

1. How fast is the fire spreading
2. Any abnormal behavior of the fire
3. Has the structure be altered to assist fire spread
4. Is the building's fire alarms sounding
5. Is there any missing furnishings or equipment
6. Any unusual findings inside the structure as possible causes of ignition

Information to Obtain After Knockdown

1. Look for any burn patterns
2. Can you detect any unusual odors
3. Quickly note the location of all furnishings



Photo by Peter Matthews/Firehouse.com

Conducting Overhaul Operations

1. Only pull enough ceilings or walls to check for hidden fire
2. Leave everything the way you found it for the investigators.
3. Don't remove any furnishing before authorized to by investigators.
4. After the investigators are finished with their investigation, conduct a thorough overhaul

Motives for Arson

Revenge: disgruntled employee, domestic or neighbor dispute, gang related, drug related

Juveniles: gang activity, curiosity, thrills, abuse

Profit: business declining, bad location, desire to relocate or remodel, unable to sell property, financial problems (foreclosure, back taxes etc.)

Vanity: frustrated security guard, firefighter, and "hero syndrome"

Conceal Other Crime: destroy evidence (burglary, homicide, or other criminal activity)

Pyromaniac: personality disorders, thought to be sexually motivated, usually abuse alcohol, poor family relationship, usually male.

Civil disorder: riots, radical groups

-Prepared by Russell Merrick/Firehouse.com