



# Jackson Hole Fire/EMS Operations Manual

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Title: **Fire Investigation**  
Division: 12  
Article: 10  
Revised: 7-06  
Pages: 5

## PURPOSE

To ensure the investigation of all fires occurring within the Town of Jackson and Teton County which cause destruction or damage to property. These guidelines establish a methodology based on national standards of good practice to insure a thorough, well-organized, and competent investigation.

Jackson Hole Fire/EMS investigators will conduct investigations with due regard for the legal process and will utilize these procedures in the course of their duties.

## POLICY

1. It shall be the policy of this department to make every effort to determine the circumstances, origin, and cause of all fires, explosions and other hazardous conditions within the jurisdiction.
2. It shall be the policy of this department to immediately notify the Fire Marshal when any of the following circumstances exist.
  - a. Arson, incendiary or suspicious fires.
  - b. Fires involving juveniles.
  - c. Evidence of suspicions of any crime having occurred in connection with the emergency.
  - d. Deaths or injuries from fires or hazardous events to citizens or department personnel.
  - e. Explosions of any kind or acts of terrorism (i.e. fire bombing, other related types of bombings, structural sabotage, etc.)
  - f. Working fires of any kind, which causes damage or loss.
  - g. The unauthorized release of any hazardous material.
  - h. Hazardous condition of an occupancy representing an immediate threat to life safety of its occupant(s) or surrounding community (i.e. assembly overcrowding, blocked exits, building collapse, compromised fire protection and detection systems, etc.)
  - i. Other related hazards and/or fires as determined by the on-scene incident commander.

## **SECTION I: RESPONSIBILITY**

1. It is the responsibility of the Incident Commander to ensure that notification of the Fire Marshal is made.
2. It is the responsibility of all officers and members to be alert for any evidence of incendiarism or cause of the fire and to preserve such evidence until the scene is properly transferred to the authority of the Fire Investigator.
3. It is the responsibility of the Incident Commander to conduct the investigation when a Fire Investigator is not available.
4. It is the responsibility of the Fire Investigator to conduct the investigation in accordance with department policies and procedures, rules of evidence and standards of good practice, as accepted by law.
5. It is the responsibility of the Fire Investigator to notify Law Enforcement whenever any evidence of a crime is discovered or detected. If such evidence is directly related to the cause of the fire, the Fire Investigator will transfer jurisdiction to appropriate officers, as agreed upon prior to transfer.

## **SECTION II: REPORTING ON-SCENE**

1. The investigator shall advise Dispatch of his/her arrival at the incident scene.
2. The arriving investigator shall report to the incident commander and obtain all pertinent information prior to commencing the scene examination.

## **SECTION III - SCENE SECURITY**

1. Prior to commencing the scene examination the investigator shall take the necessary precautions to prevent entry into the scene by unauthorized persons. Entry/overhaul of any structure/vehicle will be closely coordinated between Command and the fire investigator. The following may be utilized to secure a scene:
  1. Fire line or hazardous area tape.
  2. Police officers.
  3. Fire/EMS personnel.
  4. Other means as circumstances dictate.

## **SECTION IV - PRE-EXAMINATION INTERVIEWS**

1. The investigator should conduct brief interviews with first arriving Fire/EMS members to obtain information relative to conditions encountered, forced entry made, or any other observations that will assist the investigator.
2. The investigator should also conduct brief interviews of witnesses, bystanders, police officers, or other persons who may provide insight as to the cause of the incident. Obtain phone number, address, social security number, and other pertinent contact information of witnesses for follow-up interviews.

## **SECTION V - SAFETY EQUIPMENT**

1. Prior to entering an emergency scene the investigator shall dress-out in safety equipment as the scene dictates, i.e., helmet, hard hat, boots, dust mask, turnout gear, protective clothing, SCBA, etc.
2. Additional safety equipment may be obtained from a company operating at the scene. Prior to removing equipment from fire apparatus advise the appropriate engineer or company officer of your equipment need.

## **SECTION VI - PHOTOGRAPHS**

1. Photographs taken at incident scenes will become part of the investigative report. A photo log and numbering system shall be provided for photographs taken in conjunction with investigations.
2. Photo documentation of incidents should be thorough and complete. All areas of the incident including interior, exterior, evidence discovered, extent of damage, etc. shall be photographed.

## **SECTION VII - EVIDENCE COLLECTION AND PRESERVATION**

- A. For all fires determined to be intentionally set, all physical evidence observed at an incident scene shall be properly collected, itemized, analyzed, and stored for use in criminal/civil court. In cases determined to be unintentionally set, all physical evidence shall be left on scene, unless removal for testing is necessary to determine the cause of the fire.
- B. Proper chain of custody forms shall be provided for all evidence collected.
- C. Evidence that has been analyzed and returned to the investigator should be transferred to the custody of the Jackson Police Department or Teton County Sheriff's Office for proper safeguarding until such time the evidence is no longer useful.

## **SECTION VIII - SCENE EXAMINATION**

1. Structure Fires (See Structure Fire Form)
  - a. Photograph all fires in progress.
  - b. Obtain a Consent to Search from the Owner/Occupant whenever possible.
  - c. Survey and photograph the exterior of the structure for evidence of external sources of ignition and physical evidence. Photograph/note the condition/position of doors, windows, and locking devices.
  - d. Examine the utility services (gas, electric, telephone, cable for fire cause or service status). A technician from the utility company may be utilized for this examination.
  - e. Enter the structure as conditions permit to determine area of origin.
  - f. Once the area of origin has been determined examine this area thoroughly for fire cause. The cause determination should be documented with photographs and sketches. Evidence of incendiary fires should be properly collected and submitted for analysis.

1. After completing the scene examination the building should be turned over to a responsible party.
2. Fatal Fires (See Fire Fatality or LODD Forms)
  - a. Secure the scene immediately. Allow for only essential fire operations.
  - b. Request Law Enforcement to respond to the scene.
  - c. If victim has been moved, i.e. resuscitation had been attempted, immediately interview the firefighters who first discovered and/or moved the victim. Obtain the firefighters' written statements as quickly as possible. Obtain ambulance patient care report as quickly as possible.
  - d. The fire investigation will be conducted simultaneously and in cooperation with the Jackson Police Department or Teton County Sheriff's Office.
3. Vehicle Fires (See Vehicle Fire Form)
  - a. Photograph all fires in progress.
  - b. Obtain a Consent to Search from the Owner/Occupant whenever possible.
  - c. Examine exterior of vehicle for exterior sources of ignition, body damage, tires, physical evidence.
  - d. Examine engine compartment for mechanical/electrical causes or engine condition.
  - e. Examine passenger compartment for fire cause or physical evidence.
  - f. Document license plate and VIN.
  - g. Examine trunk compartment.
  - h. Photograph and sketch vehicle location showing relative location on property and extent of damage.
  - i. Gather and process any physical evidence of incendiary fires.
4. Wildland Fires (See Wildland Fire Form)
  - a. Photograph all fires in progress.
  - b. Interview fire fighters and the reporting party to establish an area of origin.
  - c. Obtain a Consent to Search from the Owner/Occupant whenever possible.
  - d. Map and sketch the area of origin.
  - e. Photograph and sketch the area of origin.
  - f. Gather and process any physical evidence of incendiary fires.
5. Miscellaneous Fires
  - a. Examination of these scenes should follow guidelines similar to those for structure and vehicle fires.
6. Explosives Incidents
  - a. For the safety of all personnel the investigation of incidents involving explosives or explosive devices shall be conducted under the direction of the Jackson Police Department or Teton County Sheriff's Office Hazardous Device Technicians. Should these officers not be available, hazardous device technicians from other law enforcement agencies may be requested through Dispatch. Fire/EMS personnel will assist the investigating officers in a

support role.

7. Hazardous Materials

- a. When conducting investigations at incidents involving hazardous materials the investigator shall utilize the resources available to insure a safe yet thorough investigation.
- b. At incidents involving illegal disposal of hazardous wastes the investigator shall document for criminal disposition, the circumstances of such disposal utilizing proper evidence gathering techniques. These may include:
  - a. Photographs.
  - b. Scene sketch.
  - c. Collection of samples with subsequent submittal for analysis.
  - d. Document witness statements or other investigative leads as they develop.
- c. The investigation of hazardous material releases or illegal disposal should include the proper disposal of those materials or remediation of the affected areas to mitigate environmental impact or threat to the general public. A responsible party will be identified and will be directed to properly mitigate the site.

8. Report/Case Preparation

- a. The fire investigator will complete an investigation report for each incident investigated.
- b. For every scene examination a report shall be prepared and submitted to the Deputy Chief - Prevention by the inspector whose responsibility it is to investigate an incident. The report shall be typed and shall include scene sketches, photo log and evidence log, and a narrative including all facts of the case and an opinion/summary as to the origin and cause of the fire. Inspectors providing assistance either directly or indirectly shall submit a supplemental report as to their involvement with the investigation.
- c. All photographs of the scene/incident will be filed with the final report.
- d. Investigation reports involving incendiary fires shall be forwarded directly to the Law Enforcement Officer assigned to the case.