TOLEDO FIRE & RESCUE DEPARTMENT

C-38 Fire Investigations

Emergency Manual

Date Revised: 10/09/2023

Last Modified: 09/27/2024 09:44

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Policy/Procedure

Proper identification of a fire's cause and origin is an imperative component of the protective service the Department provides to the citizens of Toledo. Command must evaluate the circumstances of the fire and the evidence presented to determine whether the fire warrants a simple fireground investigation by the officer in charge, or a more detailed, crime-based inspection by a Fire Investigator. The following procedures have been established to assist the Incident Commander in making this decision:

1. In all incidents where the Incident Commander feels that an investigation by Toledo Fire and Rescue Department Fire Investigation Unit personnel is warranted, or where an incident requires an Investigator pursuant to this procedure, a Chief Officer shall either approve the request for, or, request an Investigator themselves.

2. There are Two Levels of Response:

1. **Police Crew Response:** This response is sufficient for the following incidents, whether it is deemed incendiary or undetermined:
    1. Vehicle fires with no injuries.
        1. **Exceptions:** See Section "B", Number 5.
    2. Dumpster fires with no device present.
        1. **Note:** According to Kirk's Fire Investigation 7th Ed, a device is "any chemical or mechanical contrivance or means used to start a fire or explosion."
    3. Unattached garage fires where no witness is present.

    1. **Exception:** See Section “B”, Number 7.

4. Vacant structures where there are no suspects, witnesses, or incendiary devices present.

    1. **Exceptions:** See Section “B”, Numbers 5.

2. **Immediate Response by a Fire Investigator:** This response shall be requested when the following situations are encountered:

    1. Any fire where there is a civilian fatality/injury or if there is an injury to a firefighter and the cause is undetermined or incendiary.

        1. **Note:** All FATAL fires require each investigator be called to the scene. Civilian/firefighter injuries only require the primary and back-up investigator to be called. The back-up investigator will be directed to the corresponding transport hospital.

    2. All fires to an occupied structure where the origin is incendiary, suspicious, or undetermined, regardless of the estimated amount of dollar loss.

    3. All fires at vacant structures where there is a witness, suspect, or incendiary device present, or at any fire where there is a witness who observed and can identify the individual who set the fire.

    4. All fires at which law enforcement officers make an arrest related to the fire.

    5. **All incidents to include:** “vacant house”, vehicle, dumpster, and garage fires where there is a device present or where physical evidence indicating an attempt to start a fire is discovered, i.e. (visible pour patterns, fuel cans, multiple areas of origin, unusual odors that would indicate a possible accelerant). These types of incidents regardless of whether or not a fire resulted require documentation by a Fire Investigator as police crews are not normally provided the equipment to take pictures or to safely collect and transport such devices.

    6. At all multiple alarm fires.

    7. At all structure fires where a building, or buildings, have been the target of multiple, separate fires over a period of time regardless of the estimated amount of dollar loss. At all vehicle fires where there are multiple vehicle fires in a given geographical area regardless of the estimated amount of dollar loss.

    8. At any structure fire, regardless of the estimated amount of dollar loss, where there is evidence of newly applied gang-related graffiti, or any structure that has been the recent target of a “shooting into a habitation.”

    9. At all fires where the building is to be demolished following completion of Toledo Fire and Rescue Department operations at the site.

        1. **Note:** At all fires where the building is to be demolished, Command shall request the

response of a Fire Investigator prior to the demolition. It is imperative that the Investigator be afforded the opportunity to complete his or her investigation prior to the demolition process.

3. When an Investigator is responding, a fire company, or companies, shall remain on the scene to maintain control of the scene and to transfer pertinent information to the Investigator. To insure the safety of our personnel, at NO TIME will a member of our FIU be left alone at a fire scene. The fire company shall not leave the scene until the Investigator releases them. For extended on scene times, Command may arrange for a relief crew as necessary.

4. Protecting the scene is critical in a fire investigation. Crews shall move only what is necessary for the extinguishment of the fire, then discontinue overhauling and leave the scene as undisturbed as possible. Removing furniture and items from the structure prior to the arrival of the Investigator hampers the investigation and destroys evidence.

5. Command shall follow established procedures for fire deaths and homicides. Crews shall secure the scene and restrict all non-essential personnel from entering the structure or area until the Investigator authorizes entrance.

6. Weapons or valuables discovered at the scene shall be inventoried by Command and at least one witness and given to the Investigator or police. A receipt, TPD form 23.12, should be received for articles given to police. A notation shall be made on the incident report form and in the company journal regarding this exchange. The entry shall include the person to whom the inventory was surrendered.

7. Command or crew members obtaining information pertaining to the incident from witnesses or bystanders shall record the name, address, and telephone number of the individual providing such information, and inform Command and the Investigator on the scene to facilitate a follow up interview.

8. Command shall establish a dollar loss on all fires as the amount of loss can determine the level of charges filed against an arsonist.

9. If a Fire Investigator is called to a fire scene, it is a crime scene until proven otherwise. No civilians should be in the area of origin until the Fire Investigator releases the scene. The integrity of the scene must be maintained, access limited to authorized fire or law enforcement personnal only.

See Also:

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https://www.tfrdpolicies.com/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=c_manual:c38

Last update: **09/27/2024 09:44**