

Washington Township Fire Department Standard Operating Procedure

Division 200: Emergency Operations
Section 203: Fire Suppression
Subject 203.07: Fire Investigation Procedures
Supersedes:



Approved By:

Date: January 31, 2006

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PURPOSE:

To identify the proper procedures on how to determine the origin, cause and other factors that may have contributed to the ignition and growth of a fire.

RESPONSIBILITY:

It shall be the responsibility of all fire investigators for the Washington Township Fire Department to familiarize themselves with and follow this policy.

PROCEDURES:

The Washington Township Fire Department when performing fire investigations shall follow the Ohio Revised Code, Ohio Fire Code and NFPA 921, 2003 Edition, which are indicative of the law and guidelines for fire investigations. These procedures shall complement and serve to guide during investigations, and are not intended to supersede any law or state rule.

A systematic approach is used in processing every fire scene. The investigators job is to determine the exact origin and cause of a fire after ruling out all possibilities of how and where the fire started. This may be accomplished while working in conjunction with other appropriate agencies. The investigator may work with insurance adjusters and/or private investigators throughout and after the investigation.

If possible the investigator will document a fire scene with still photographs or video prior to the extinguishment of a fire. This should include the immediate and general area including victims, crowds, vehicles and team operations.

When the fire scene is secure and safe for entry, the investigator will observe, document and photograph the scene. The scene is secured from the time of arrival, throughout the investigation and until the scene is officially released back to the property owner.

While at the fire scene the investigator should:

1. Interview property owner, witnesses, bystanders, and firefighters.
2. Process the physical scene by examining the structure or scene for fire patterns and evidence.
3. Document the scene with photographs and diagrams.
4. Preserve and collect evidence by maintaining "Chain of Custody" so it is clearly documented who has handled it, when and why.
5. Provide information to the Incident Commander for media releases.

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The investigator shall use all approved forms for documentation during and after the fire investigation. These forms should include the Field Incident Report (Form 21), Witness Statement(s)(Form 57B), and the cover sheet for the investigation file (Form 57).

The investigator shall submit all findings to the Incident Commander and all proper reports to the Fire Marshal, containing all information regarding the investigation. All information obtained by the investigator shall remain confidential until a determination is made and approved by the Fire Chief, or his designee.

References:

National Fire Protection Association

Standard 921 – Guide for Fire & Explosion Investigations