INTRODUCTION

The Uniform Fire Code mandates that fire departments investigate all fire occurrences to determine their cause and point of origin. The data gathered is used to develop building, fire, and general safety standards in an effort to reduce fire incidents in the future.

POLICY

Fire investigations shall be performed promptly on all fires occurring within the district to determine origin and cause.

DEFINITIONS

The following terms have been defined for the purpose of this document and program.

COMPANY OFFICER: Acting Company Officers.

NUISANCE FIRES: Any fire in which damage is limited to debris piles or dumpsters, tanbark, small grass fires where no damage to a structure occurs, small fires where no appreciable damage occurs, and fires involving portable lavatories.

OFFICER IN CHARGE: The Incident Commander in charge of the scene.

RESPONSIBILITY

Fire investigations are divided into three levels with specific responsibilities identified at each level.

- Level I: Investigations in which cause and origin can be determined.
- Level II: Investigations in which special skills are required to make a determination that is not available at Level I.
- Level III: Investigations in which fire is determined to be caused by an unlawful act.

- Company Officers will be responsible for, and able to investigate and document, Level I fire investigations.
- Training and direction will be provided to Company Officers who are responsible for the initial steps of Level I fire investigation.
- Fire Investigators will be responsible for, and able to investigate, Level II fire investigations. Investigators will be able to assist with Level III investigations as directed by the Fire Marshal.
• Investigation data will be organized and prepared in such a manner that prosecuting agencies can analyze and determine if further criminal investigation and/or prosecution will occur.

• Standards for documentation and reporting will be developed for each level of investigation (I, II, and III) in conjunction with NFPA Standard No. 921, local, and regional efforts.

• Reports of incendiary type fires will be completed per the District’s standard and forwarded to the local agency having law enforcement jurisdiction.

• Public education needs, trends, and programs will be identified through fire investigation outcomes.

PROCEDURE

A. LEVELS OF INVESTIGATION

Some general considerations in determining when to call a Fire Investigator are:

• Is there physical evidence at the scene that cannot be preserved?

• Are there witnesses or suspects at the scene that would require immediate interviews that can only be conducted by a Fire Investigator?

• Is the local law enforcement available to perform interviews?

• Are there reasons to believe that the Fire Investigator will be able to perform any task which could not be performed by a Company Officer?

If the cause of the fire is undetermined and/or meets the criteria listed below as Level II in these guidelines, a Fire Investigator should be called. If the cause of the fire is determined to meet the criteria listed below as Level III in these guidelines, the appropriate law enforcement agency should be called.

1. LEVEL I

Any fire having an origin and cause that can be determined with the skills and resources available to a Company Officer. An Investigator need not be called.

Categories of Level I investigations are as follows:

1. Any fire not meeting Level II or III minimal criteria is a Level I fire.

2. Any fire in which the origin and cause is readily apparent.

3. Any fire in which the origin and cause can be identified and documented by the Company Officer.
4. All fires involving juveniles where the origin and cause can be identified and documented by the Company Officer and the name(s) and contact information of suspect juvenile(s) has been determined and forwarded to the responsible Law Enforcement Agency and Fire Prevention Bureau.

5. Vehicle fires not involving theft, injuries, and/or fatalities in which origin and cause can be determined and documented. Vehicle fires that are determined by the company officer to be of an incendiary nature will be referred to the responsible Law Enforcement Agency and Fire Prevention Bureau informed.

- Fires causing little or no significant damage that are generally considered nuisance fires.
- Fires falling within Level I categories 1 through 5, involving suspected code violations. If the officer in charge can document suspected code violations, referral to the Fire Prevention Bureau shall be made for follow-up on the next regularly scheduled duty day.
- Fires falling within Level I categories 1 through 5, involving suspected construction or installation deficiencies. If the officer in charge can document suspected construction or installation deficiencies, referral to the Fire Prevention Bureau shall be made for follow-up in writing on the next regularly scheduled duty day.
- C.D.F. must be notified for investigation and report purposes on all wildland fires in State Responsibility Areas (SRA).
- Any fire that the company officer determines is incendiary in nature, that does not meet Level II criteria, will be referred by the company officer to the local Law Enforcement Agency and Fire Prevention Bureau informed.

2. LEVEL II

Any fire investigation that, by its nature, requires special technical skills and resources not available to a Company Officer.

Examples of Level II investigations are as follows:
- Fires unable to be properly investigated by Company Officers.
- Any fire involving a fatality and/or serious injury.
- Any second alarm structure fire in any occupancy type weekdays between 0730 and 1730 hours.
- Any second alarm fire involving a commercial or multi-family occupancy.
- Major wildland fires (2nd alarm or greater with mutual aid).
- Any incident involving an explosion or explosives.
- Any incident with special circumstances as determined by the Chief Officer.

A Fire Investigator should be called when it has been determined that a series of fires have occurred in an area and suspicious individuals have been seen at other fires, etc.

A Fire Investigator should be called for fires where gross fire code violations which the Company Officer cannot adequately document or which may be destroyed and are suspected of being the cause of or contributing to the spread of the fire.

A Fire Investigator should be called for fires where suspected serious construction or installation deficiencies, which the Company Officer cannot adequately document or which may have been destroyed, are suspected of being the cause of or contributing to the spread of the fire.

Wildland fires in State Responsibility Areas (SRA) will still be investigated by the District Investigator, who will begin the investigation and assist C.D.F. as much as possible.

3. LEVEL III

Fires as a result of the district’s investigative efforts are determined to be caused by an unlawful act are classified as a Level III investigation. Level III fire investigations of merit shall be referred to the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction for criminal investigation and prosecution i.e. Police Department; Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms; State Fire Marshal; District Attorney’s Office.
B. AUTOMATIC INVESTIGATOR RESPONSE

Automatic response of a Fire Investigator will be initiated by dispatch under the following circumstances:

- At any time upon report of a second or greater alarm structure fire in a commercial building. Commercial buildings also include hospitals, nursing homes, care facilities, apartments, hotels, motels, or any other multifamily residential building.

- At any time upon report of a major wildland fire, second or greater alarm.

- Cancellation of the responding Fire Investigator under these circumstances shall be at the direction of the duty Chief.

C. SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION PROGRAM – (The Program Will)

- The program will enable personnel to investigate all fires, which occur in district boundaries, for cause and origin determination.

- The fire investigation program will be divided into three distinct levels of investigation with parameters for each level and responsible personnel identified.

- The first arriving Company Officer will initiate fire investigations for all fires to which they have responded.

- In State Responsibility Areas (SRA), the district will provide initial investigative efforts for “wildland” type fires and lend assistance, if requested, to State Investigators. Other than “wildland” or native shrubbery fires, the district has investigative responsibility in SRA.

- Company Officers will complete and document, cause and origin information, for Level I fire investigations.

- Fire Investigators will have scheduled standby assignments established throughout the calendar year as agreed upon in the Memorandum of Understanding.

- Company Officers and Fire Investigators will complete and document, according to defined standards, all Level I, II, & III fires.

- Fire Investigators will respond to fires when requested by the duty Chief.

- Fires determined to be incendiary will have their investigations documented and completed promptly. Incendiary type fires of merit shall be referred to the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction.
The district will act in a supporting role with prosecuting agencies of incendiary type fires, fires resulting from explosions, or explosives.

Neighborhoods experiencing repetitious fires or patterns of fire occurrences will be investigated to determine relationships of fire cause.

Fire suppression personnel will make every effort to protect the fire scene from unnecessary damage during fire fighting and overhaul operations to help ensure that an effective fire investigation can be conducted.

D. SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION PROGRAM – (The Program Will Not)

- A call for a Fire Investigator will not take place until the duty Chief has confirmed that the responsible Company Officer has exhausted his/her abilities to complete the investigation.

- The district does not intend to be the prosecuting agency for arson or incendiary type fires.

- Investigators will not be called to a fire scene which the Company Officer can investigate adequately.

- Company Officers will not be expected to investigate fires requiring investigation techniques beyond their skill level.

- Fire Investigators will not be called to the fire scene for Level I fires that the Company Officer is able to investigate and determine the cause, origin, and document in incident report narrative.

- The fire scene will not be left unattended prior to a complete investigation being performed or while awaiting the arrival of an Investigator or outside responding agency.

E. SUCCESS CRITERIA

- Company Officers will have received training and be capable of initiating the fire investigation.

- Company Officers will document in the Incident Report cause and origin, names of people individuals involved, and all other necessary information.

- Fire Investigators are appropriately called to the fire scene to perform investigations.
The Investigator callback system is reliable.

Evidence is not destroyed prior to investigation.

Police agencies are summoned to all incendiary fires.

Prosecuting agencies are provided with all the information gathered by the District in order to proceed with cases of merit.

All reports must be complete and submitted in a timely manner. All reports are reviewed for quality and standardized format.

Appropriate coordination occurs between all agencies.