

Subject:	FIRE INVESTIGATION
Section:	PPG# 4500
Chapter:	Operations
Effective Date:	7/1/98

1.0 POLICY

- 1.1** It shall be the policy of Thurston County Fire Protection District. 5 & 9 to ensure that fires are investigated and to assist in determining the contributing factors/condition including possible criminal activity.

- 2.1.1** When deemed necessary by the Shift Commander, assistance will be requested from a department investigator.

The control and release of any information concerning suspicious fires shall be authorized and supervised by the Fire Chief.

Training will be provided to all members concerning the procedures to follow when a fire is considered to be of suspicious origin.

2.0 GUIDELINES

- 2.1** All fires (structures, vehicles, boats, etc) shall be investigated as follows.

- 5.1.1** The area of origin shall be identified as soon as possible by the officer-in-charge at the scene. This area, identified by yellow surveyors tape, shall be off limits to all persons except those necessary to control fire spread and to investigate the cause.

- 2.2** An investigator from the Fire Marshal's office must be called in under the following circumstances.

- 2.3** For fires in facilities regulated by the Office of the State Fire Marshal, which includes state-licensed nursing homes, boarding homes, group homes, and child care facilities.

- 2.4** The overall coordination of the investigation procedure shall lie with the Fire Marshal's office or assistance may be sought from the sheriff's office, F.B.I, U.S. Product Safety Commission, insurance companies.

- 5.4** During response to the fire scene, any persons or vehicle leaving the scene shall be noted, including a license number.
- (a)** At the fire scene, the following observations should be made:
 - (b)** The color, amount and location of both fire and/or smoke
 - (c)** The presence of any unusual odors such as gasoline
 - (d)** The security of the involved structure or vehicle as locked or unlocked; doors and/or windows opened closed; type of entry (forced or otherwise); identity of persons present and their reactions (obtain an address, phone number, date of birth, physical description, clothing description, description transportation including license number).
- 5.5** If a fire investigator will be requested, the use of water and overhaul activity should be limited to fire suppression practices. The fire scene should not be altered more than necessary in extinguishment.
- 5.6** Significant evidence should not be moved unless necessary for the preservation of the evidence or for suppression of the fire. The evidence should not be moved until the investigation unit has arrived and taken custody. Such protection enables the investigator to observe, evaluate and record the evidence while in its original location, and creates a "chain of custody" necessary to be able to enter the item into evidence in court. The location and condition of a deceased fire victim can often be of critical importance to both the fire investigator and the coroner.
- 5.7** When an investigator has been requested, members and bystanders should be restricted from the immediate fire area. Only those directly involved with the fire investigation team should be permitted to enter or to remove any items from the fire scene.
- 5.8** At least one member should be permitted to remain at the fire scene until the fire investigation unit arrives.
- 5.9** Suspects should not be questioned other than to obtain basic identity information (Miranda rights). The fire investigation unit should interview any possible suspects. Any free and spontaneous statements by suspects should be noted. The investigator should be advised of the statements the suspect made or the behaviors he/she exhibited.
- 5.10** When the investigator arrives at the scene, further activities involving salvage, overhaul, removal of belongings and entrance by occupants must be cleared with the senior investigator.

RCW 48.48.065 requires any death resulting from a fire to be reported to the Washington State Fire Marshals Office within two (2) business days. (See Appendix A)

4.0 REFERENCES

RCW 52.12.031 Fire Investigation
RCW 48.48.060 Reports and investigation of fires
RCW 48.48.065 Statistical information and reports