

**Tempe Fire Department Policies and Procedures**  
**Investigation Procedures**  
**305.02**  
**Rev 11-08-05**

**PURPOSE**

These guidelines establish a methodology based on national standards of good practice to insure a thorough, well-organized, and competent investigation.

Tempe Fire Department investigators will conduct investigations with due regard for the legal process and will utilize these procedures in the course of their duties.

**PROCEDURE**

**REPORTING ON-SCENE**

- A. The investigator shall advise the Alarm Room of his/her arrival at the incident scene.
- B. The arriving investigator shall report to the incident commander and obtain all pertinent information prior to commencing the scene examination.

**SCENE SECURITY**

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:

- A. Fire line or hazardous area tape.
- B. Police officers.
- C. Fire Department personnel.
- D. Other means as circumstances dictate.

**PRE-EXAMINATION INTERVIEWS**

- A. The investigator should conduct brief interviews with first arriving Fire Department members to obtain information relative to conditions encountered, forced entry made, or any other observations that will assist the investigator.
- B. 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, date of birth information, and social security number of witnesses for follow-up interviews.

**SAFETY EQUIPMENT**

- A. Prior to entering an emergency scene the investigator shall dress-out in safety equipment as the scene dictates, i.e., hard hat, boots, dust mask, protective clothing, etc. Investigators shall not enter structures unless Command has determined that SCBAs are not necessary.
- B. 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 needs.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

- A. 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.
- B. Photo documentation of incidents should be thorough and complete. All areas of the incident including interior, exterior, evidence discovered, and extent of damage, etc. shall be photographed.

### **EVIDENCE COLLECTION AND PRESERVATION**

- A. All physical evidence observed at an incident scene shall be properly collected, itemized, analyzed, and stored for use in criminal/civil court.
- B. Evidence should be submitted for review to the Arizona Department of Public Safety Lab, or City of Tempe Police Department. Proper chain of custody forms shall be provided for all evidence collected. Submittal to these agencies shall follow the procedures established by each.

Evidence samples collected at hazardous materials incidents may be turned over to City of Tempe environmental inspectors for analysis at facilities which are qualified to analyze hazardous waste.

- C. Evidence that has been analyzed and returned to the investigator should be transferred to the custody of the Tempe Police Department for proper safeguarding until such time the evidence is no longer useful.

### **SCENE EXAMINATION**

#### **A. Structure Fires**

1. Photograph all fires in progress.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Enter the structure as conditions permit to determine area of origin.
5. 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.
6. After completing the scene examination the building should be turned over to a responsible party.

#### **B. Fatal Fires**

1. Secure the scene immediately. Allow for only essential fire operations.
2. Request a Tempe Police Department arson or homicide detective.
3. If the victim has been moved, i.e. resuscitation, immediately interview the firefighters who first discovered and/or moved the victim. Obtain the firefighter's written statement as quickly as possible.

4. The fire investigation will be conducted simultaneously and in cooperation with Tempe Police Department's Death Investigation Unit.

C. Vehicle Fires

1. Examine exterior of vehicle for exterior sources of ignition, body damage, tires, and physical evidence.
2. Examine engine compartment for mechanical/electrical causes or engine condition.
3. Examine passenger compartment for fire cause or physical evidence.
4. Document license plate and VIN.
5. Examine trunk compartment.
6. Photograph and sketch vehicle location showing relative location on property and extent of damage.
7. Gather and process any physical evidence of incendiary fires.

D. Miscellaneous Fires

Examination of these scenes should follow guidelines similar to those for structure and vehicle fires.

E. Explosives Incidents

For the safety of all personnel the investigation of incidents involving explosives or explosive devices shall be conducted under the direction of the Tempe Police Department Hazardous Device Technicians. Should these officers not be available, hazardous device technicians from other law enforcement agencies such as the Department of Public Safety; Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms; Maricopa County Sheriff's Office; or U.S. military may be dispatched to an explosives scene. Fire Department personnel will assist the investigating officers in a support role.

F. Industrial Accidents

The investigation of industrial accidents which result in injury or death should be conducted in conjunction with those agencies (OSHA, Industrial Commission) which are responsible for such investigations. Fire Department Investigators will assume a support role rather than a lead role at these incidents.

G. Hazardous Materials

1. When conducting investigations at incidents involving hazardous materials the investigator shall utilize the resources available to insure a safe yet thorough investigation. These resources include Fire Department Hazardous Materials Teams, City of Tempe Environmental Services Inspectors, Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, Arizona Attorney General's Office, or private sector hazardous waste companies.
2. 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:
  - Photographs.
  - Scene sketch.
  - Collection of samples with subsequent submittal for analysis.
  - Document witness statements or other investigative leads as they develop.
3. 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.

H. Report/Case Preparation

The fire investigator will make all necessary entries in the Record Management System regarding any incident(s) that they investigate. If there was no incident record created the investigator shall contact the alarm room and request an incident record be created.

For every scene examination a report shall be prepared and saved in the Record Management System by the inspector whose responsibility it is to investigate an incident. The report 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.

All photographs of the scene/incident will be filed with the final report.